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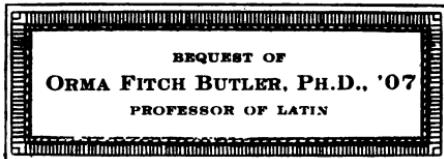
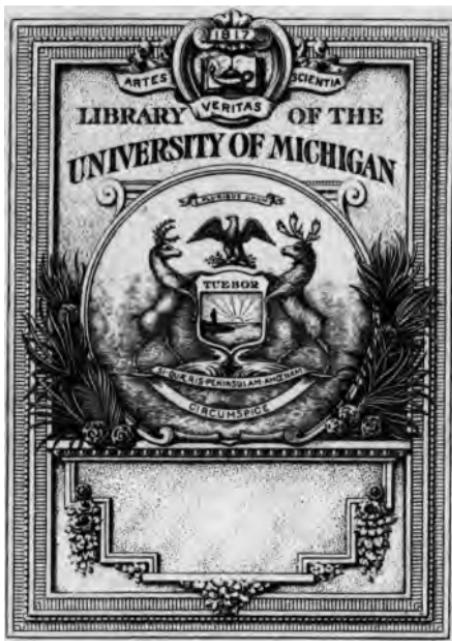
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ROSE AND ROSE

A Story

*Edward BY
Ferrall*
E. V. LUCAS



NEW  YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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J. F. BUTLER
11-28-39*

ROSE AND ROSE



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FIIFTY years ago, when I was a young medical student, I was in the habit of spending as many week-ends as possible at home with my father, to whose practice I was one day to succeed.

On a certain Saturday the only other occupants of the railway compartment were an artist and his wife. I knew him to be an artist from certain scraps of his conversation that I overheard, but I should have guessed it also on the evidence of his hands and dress. I don't mean that he wore a black velvet tam-o'-shanter and trousers tight at the ankles, as in plays; but his hands were eloquent, and there was a general careless ease about his tweeds that suggested the antipodes of any commercial or anxious calling.

After a while he turned to me and asked if I knew the town of Lowcester.

I said that I had lived in the neighbourhood—at Bullingham, five miles away—all my life.

“We are going to spend a few days at the Crown at Lowcester,” he said, “looking about to try and find a house.”

“There’s a very good house at Bullingham,” I said: “just empty. Jolly garden, too. As a matter of fact it adjoins ours. My father’s the doctor.”

“Next door to the doctor,” said the lady, speaking now for the first time. “That would be a great convenience.”

One result of this chance meeting was that they took the house and we became friends; another was the general shaping of my life; and a third is this narrative, the fruit of an old man’s egotism and leisure.

I don’t put my own case as an example to the medical profession, but you can’t deny there is a kind of fitness in it: it is surely more proper than not that the doctor who presides at the birth of

a child should continue to take an interest in that child throughout its life. Being born is, after all, something of an event, and he who assists in that adventure and helps to introduce a new soul (not to mention a new body) to this already overcrowded and over-complicated planet of ours, ought to be counted as something a little more important than a jobbing gardener, say, or any other useful ally that the householder calls in. For no matter how mechanical his services, he is also an instrument of destiny.

None the less, if accoucheurs were expected to follow the fortunes of every new arrival from the cradle to the grave one of two things would happen: either the medical profession would disappear for want of recruits, or home life (with the addition of the semi-parental doctor intervening between father and mother) would become more difficult than it already is. Perhaps then it is as well that the man-with-the-black-bag remains the piano-tuner that he more or less appears to be. But I shall continue to believe that so tremendous an affair as a birth should carry more fatefulness with it; although for the well-being of patients I can see that it is better that doctors should be

machines rather than sympathetic temperaments. Good Heavens! if we were not so mechanical into what sentimental morasses should we land ourselves!

All this, however, is more or less irrelevant and too much concerned with myself. But you will find that preoccupation, I fear, throughout this story, such as it is. I commenced author, you see, at a time of life when it is not easy to keep to the point or exclude garrulity. When one does not take to writing until one is over seventy—I shall be seventy-one this year, 1920—readers must expect a certain want of business-like adroitness. Had you known me in the days when I was in practice, before I was established on the shelf, you would have found me, I hope, direct and forcible and relevant enough. The stethoscope was mightier than the pen.

Still, there is more relevance than perhaps you would think, for I am coming to a case where the doctor and the newly-born established an inti-

macy that was destined to grow and to endure through life. For, as it chanced, my father died very soon after I was qualified, and when our new neighbours, the Allinsons, became parents, it was I who was called in to assist. I was then twenty-seven. Circumstances of personal friendship and contiguity alone might have promoted a closer association than is customary between the babe and the intermediary; but the controlling factors were the death of the mother, after which many of the decisions which a mother would have to make devolved on me; and Rose's delicate little body, which caused her during her early years to need fairly constant watching. The result was that until a certain unexpected event happened she moved about almost exclusively between her father's house and mine and was equally at home in both. But even with such a beginning it never crossed my mind that the strands of our fate were to be so interwoven.

Rose's father was a landscape painter of rather more than independent means: sufficient at any

rate to make it possible for him to seek loveliness in no matter how distant a land. He had sketches which he had made all over Europe, in Morocco, in Egypt, in Japan. But France was his favourite hunting ground, partly, I think, because he liked the comments of the French peasants who stood behind his easel better than those of any other critic.

Artists, even when they are poor, are enviable men. They live by enjoyment—their work is fun—for even if the unequal struggle to persuade pigments to reproduce nature fills them with despair, they are still occupied with beauty, still seeing only what they want to see, and remote from squalor and sordidness and the ills of life.

Theodore Allinson took the fullest advantage of his artistic temperament and his private fortune. The one enabled him to ignore whatever was unpleasing, and the other to fulfil every wandering caprice. It was all in keeping with such a man's destiny that he should have as a next-door neighbour an ordinary trustworthy fellow like myself, who could be depended upon to keep an eye on his motherless infant when he was

absent. Or, for that matter, when he was present too. He would have taken it as a very cruel injustice on the part of the gods if I had moved to any other part of the kingdom—as probably any decently ambitious young man in my position would have done. How he would have raised his clenched fists to Heaven and railed against fate! But, luckily for him, I could eat the lotus too.

My lotus-eating, however, would have been only half as delightful if Allinson were not my neighbour and his small daughter my protégée. For he was easy and amusing and full of whimsical fancies, with a very solid foundation of culture beneath all, and his little girl was a continual joy.

She had taken to me at once, or at any rate had taken to my watch—watches having always been useful links between infantile patients and their medical men. Mine was a gold repeater, very satisfying to immature gums and surprising and amusing to the ear. I still have it, and sophisticated though the world has grown, and mechanically melodious with gramophone and piano-

player, it still chimes for the young with all its old allurement.

As Rose developed, the function of the repeater as a mediator decreased in importance and she and I took to more ordinary means of communicating our sympathy; but the watch laid the foundations and laid them truly.

It is extraordinary what a small child's tongue can do with an honest English name. Every one has had experience of this fantastic adaptive gift, but none could be more curious than my own. My name is Greville—Julius Greville, M.D., if you please—and if there is a sound less like Greville than "Dombeen" I should like to be told of it; but Dombeen was Rose's translation of what she so often heard her father call me, and Dombeen I have remained to her. Of all the music in the world none was more sweet to me than her cool clear voice calling "Dombeen! Dombeen!"

Our gardens were separated only by an old fruit wall with a gate in it, both sides of the gate being equally Rose's domain; and I used to rejoice when on returning from my rounds I saw her dainty proud little head among the fruit bushes.

Briggs, my gardener and my father's gardener before me, was the happier for her society too, as she circled about him like a robin and never ceased her inquisitorial functions.

"Lord, but she do flummox me sometimes," he would say. "The things that child wants to know! It isn't only book-learning that's needed, it's flower-learning too. It makes me feel that ignorant."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, why one flower's blue and another pink. Man and boy I've worked in gardens, and with good head-men over me too when I was learning —Scotchmen and all—but I never heard about that. Never even wondered about it. 'So as to look prettier in nosegays' was all I could say; but it must go deeper than that. I told her to ask you, you being a gentleman of learning, but

she says, ‘No, no, Briggs, it’s what a gardener ought to know,’ and she’s right.

“Here’s some more nuts of hers to crack—‘Why do some flowers have scent and others don’t?’ ‘Who discovered that potatoes are good to eat?’ ‘Who began to put horse-radish with beef?’ ‘Why are butterflies called butterflies?’ Really, sir, you ought to take her on, she makes me seem that ignorant. She won’t ask me the things I do know. The funny part of it is,” Briggs went on, “she doesn’t want to have a garden of her own. Some children are mad about that, but she doesn’t care. All she wants is to walk about among the flowers, or stand by me, and watch and watch.”

And off he went.

He came back a moment later. “It would be very good of you,” he said, “to try and find out why butterflies are called butterflies. My missis wants to know too.”

I remember another of Briggs’ stories of Rose. “The other day,” he said—this was when Rose was about six—“she brought a tooth—the one that you gave her a shilling for if she didn’t cry when she went to have it pulled—and what do

you think? She wanted me to plant it for her. Plant it! And what for? So as it would grow into a soldier, as it did in some book they'd been reading to her.

"‘A soldier?’ I said, wishing to tease her a little, ‘why a soldier, I should like to know? Why not a gardener?’

“‘Pooh, gardeners!’ she said. ‘That wouldn’t be any fun. Besides, teeth don’t grow into gardeners anyway, they grow into soldiers’; and she comes out every morning and evening to water it.”

Rose’s want of interest in work of any kind extended to games. Her boredom when her father and I were at croquet or billiards was abysmal, and I could never induce her to persevere with a mallet. Her playground was the world, and her play was to be in it, and see it, and, I doubt not, speculate as to its peculiarities. She liked to have stories read to her, but she liked better to invent them for herself and relate them.

to herself as she walked about, outdoors or in. But when she could get one's whole attention, which is the too-often-frustrated desire of most children, she was happiest. A walk with me in the garden when I was "ab-so-loot-ly" idle, without scissors or spud or preoccupation, was one of her special treats; the tendency of grown up people to let their eyes wander towards weeds or suckers or green fly being among her heavy crosses.

But her crosses were few. She must have been one of the first children for whom those in authority made the world primarily a happy place. It is more or less the rule now, but it was exceptional then.

Like most little girls she was interested in young creatures: more than interested, enchanted by them. The finest horse in the world—Iroquois, say, who had just won the Derby—the finest cow, the finest sheep, left her calm; but she trembled with rapture on catching sight of a foal or a calf or a lamb. If the lamb had a black face she screamed with joy. As for puppies and kittens, she lost her head completely over them. Again and again I have had to stop, when she has

been on my rounds with me, while she got down in order to embrace one of these impostors, and the uglier the kitten was the more she loved it. I could never break her of the habit—an extremely insanitary one, I am convinced—of hugging stray kittens.

It was odd that an ugly one should appeal to her more than a perfect one; but odder that any injured creature had such an immediate claim on her sympathy. Many children are afraid of animals that are maimed and in pain: or at any rate they avoid them. But Rose collected them. Birds with broken wings, mangy puppies, kittens that had been scalded or lamed—her infirmary always contained one or more specimens of these, and we all had to help in nursing them back to vigour.

Such was Rose in those early days when we were still neighbours. And then came one of the crises in the life of both of us.

I had been on a long day's round and returned

tired out, after eight in the evening, with the doctor's dread in my mind that another call would be waiting. There was indeed a telegram, but it was not of the kind that I had feared, but a worse. It was from the British Consul at Marseilles stating that Theodore Allinson had died of typhoid fever two days before and that his effects were being forwarded home.

Allinson's household consisted at that time of Rose's nurse and several servants under a cook, and I went over after dinner to break the news. It was, however, broken. We had so few telegrams in those days that their contents always became public, and I found the staff in tears. Rose, however, I was glad to find, had not been told.

The next thing was to inform the relatives, chief of whom was Mrs. Stratton, Theodore's sister, older by a few years, whose husband was something in the city; and a telegram, despatched to her the next morning, brought herself and Mr. Stratton quickly on the scene.

Mrs. Stratton was as different from her brother as two members of the same family can be—and often are. Where he was gay and insou-

ciant, she was grave and anxious. He was full of fun and banter; but to her life was real, life was earnest. Where he let things slide she was all for management and control. She was a big woman too, with a suggestion always of having her square-sails set and bearing down on you before the wind.

As for George Stratton, he was the nice quiet somewhat invertebrate husband that such women capture.

No sooner was Mrs. Stratton in the house than she got to work and explored every room systematically, sniffing a good deal as she inspected the canvases in the studio. Drawings were turned out, documents read, and Rose was sent off to Lowcester to be properly fitted out with black. I offered to take the child into my house until the memorial service was over, but Mrs. Stratton declined; and on this rebuff I disappeared from the scene and was not again in evidence until the ceremony in the church, which most of the neighbours and various relations, near and distant, attended.

I was however called out to a case a few miles away, and was therefore not present at the lunch-

eon that followed; but I returned in time to take my place, at the lawyer's invitation, in the studio to hear the reading of the will, in which, the lawyer informed me, to my great surprise, I was mentioned.

"As," he announced, "Mr. Allinson died abroad too far away for any of his relatives or friends to attend the funeral, it has been thought well that now, when they are convened together in his house, they may like to hear what his wishes were with regard to the disposition of his estate and the settlement of his affairs. It was fortunate that he was able to put these wishes in order before his illness had made that impossible; the document is properly signed and attested and bears every indication of cool judgment. With your permission I will now read it."

I had never been present before at the reading of a will, and I am glad not to have had the experience since. It is too dramatic. Why more plays do not contain a will scene, I cannot understand. But the dramatic quality is not all. My objection to such a ceremony is the disappointment that one has to witness, and perhaps even more the triumph. Poor human nature's

expressions of joy on coming into a few hundred pounds can be an almost tragic spectacle.

Theodore Allinson had remembered most of his relations and all of his dependants. Such benefactions came first. “ ‘The remainder of the estate,’ ” the lawyer read on, “ ‘I leave in trust to my daughter Rose, to be administered as they think best by her trustees George Stratton and Julius Greville, until her twentieth birthday when it will be hers to do as she wishes with.’ ”

The lawyer paused again and Mrs. Stratton indicated her approval of at any rate one of the trustees by a guarded smile.

“ ‘Finally,’ ” the lawyer went on, “ ‘I ask my friend and neighbour Julius Greville to become my daughter’s guardian and foster-father.’ ”

At these words a rustle of astonishment ran round the room, and no one could have been more astonished than myself. Mrs. Stratton did more than rustle: she bridled and shot me a furious glance. “Did you hear that, George?” she asked her husband in a loud whisper.

“If you please,” said the lawyer, and continued: “ ‘guardian and foster-father, re-imbur-sing himself from her estate for every expense

which that duty imposes upon him, from the present time until she shall become, on her twentieth birthday, her own mistress.' ”

He paused again and again the company sought each other's faces. Mrs. Stratton was scarlet with indignation.

“Why, that's thirteen years!” she exclaimed.

“But supposing that Dr. Greville, not unnaturally, is unwilling to take so great a responsibility?” Mr. Stratton asked, after a little whispered coaching from his wife.

“We are coming to that,” said the lawyer. “The will continues: ‘I ask Dr. Greville to do this great thing for me, because I have for him both affection and respect, and because such neglect towards our Rose as my own indolence and selfishness have betrayed me into has as far as lay in his power been corrected by him; also because Rose loves him and has profound confidence in him. I am conscious, however, that it is more than I have the right to ask, and if he declines, which he can do with perfect propriety and not the faintest suggestion of unfriendliness to me, I wish that Rose may become the ward of my sister Millicent Stratton, who I am sure will’

be delighted to have her, with the same conditions as to finance."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Stratton. "Then my brother had not entirely taken leave of his senses."

"My dear Milly!" said her husband soothingly.

"Well, and what do you say?" Mrs. Stratton asked me eagerly. "Of course you will decline?"

"Before Dr. Greville comes to any decision," the lawyer interposed, "there is a letter from the testator which he ought to read. It was included among the papers of the deceased and would have been handed to Dr. Greville earlier had he not been called away."

"But there is no need for time or consideration to be given to such a simple matter as this," said Mrs. Stratton. "It is obvious on the face of it that a busy country doctor, living alone, can have no fitness for such a delicate task as the bringing up of a girl from seven to twenty. It's preposterous, and any real friend of my brother would agree."

"In any case," said the lawyer, "I don't think that Dr. Greville should, in fairness to himself

and to every one concerned, be rushed into a decision. Here, sir, is the letter"; and he handed me an envelope which I had the prudence to put in my pocket.

And so doing, I rose and left. It is one of the rare compensations in a general practitioner's life that he can go when he likes and without ceremony. I don't say that an engagement is always awaiting us; but it is our privilege first to suggest it and secondly to be exempted from cross-examination.

As soon as I was alone I read Theodore's letter. I can give its exact words, as it is one of the very few that I have kept.

"Dear Greville," he wrote. "I've been eating oysters and they've got me. There's only a muddler of a doctor here and I have no hope anyway. One knows when one's number is up. The only thing that really worries me is Rose. Be a good fellow and take charge of her and bring her up to beat the band. I can't bear the thought of Milly getting at her and making her just like all the other women in the world. I've made my will, and the Consul here has witnessed it, so you will find everything in order. I wish I'd done

more with my life, but I haven't had a bad time and, after all, after a certain age one day may as well be one's last as another. I hate not to see you again, and as for Rose . . .”

Here the letter broke off.

George Stratton and his wife were announced before I had finished dinner, and I went to them not in the best of humour. I was tired, and the day's events had been disturbing, and I had been looking forward to a quiet dispassionate review of the whole matter. It was an evening of unusual charm too, and I am devoted to the garden in the dusk when there is only enough wind to carry the scent of flowers and not enough to disperse it. Such evenings are memorable and precious by their very infrequency and I have always grieved when one has been wasted.

Doctors, however, being more naturally, and, I suppose, even wilfully, at the mercy of other people than any one else is, I laid aside my nap-

kin with a sigh of surrender and once again prepared for duty.

I thought that George looked a little awkward, and I hastened to put him partly at his ease with a cigar. Mrs. George, who was clearly on the warpath, was not to be pacified so simply. Women aren't. Even with the spread of the tobacco habit they cannot be bought, as a man and brother can, by a Corona Corona; while a whisky-and-soda is powerless, at any rate with the Milly Strattons of this earth.

She came to the point at once. "You must excuse such an informal and probably inconvenient call," she said, "but we have to leave by an early train and I want to get everything settled. How soon will Rose be ready?"

"Ready?" I said. "For what?"

"To come to us," she replied. "You surely don't, on consideration, propose to fall in with my poor brother's very curious idea of keeping his child from her own kith and kin?"

"I don't see that I have any way out of it," I said. "The terms of the will were that I was to be Rose's guardian unless I had an insuperable objection; in which case she was to go to you.

But although I am aware that her presence here will cause certain readjustments and that possibly the child might be happier where there were more young companions, I have no objection that for a moment could be called insuperable. Besides, your brother was a friend of mine whom I knew pretty well—possibly, through our contiguity, even better than you—and it was his wish."

"His wish!" Mrs. Stratton echoed contemptuously. "And how capable was he, do you consider, of making a sensible wish? At any time, but particularly when he was so ill?"

"The will sounded sensible enough to me," I said. "It has not been contested. What do you think, Stratton?"

But Stratton was not there to talk. It was the grey mare's evening out and he was silenced almost before he had completed the preliminary stages of lip-opening.

"Even if my brother had not been at the moment so ill as to be mentally unhinged," said Mrs. Stratton, "you must agree that the case is most peculiar. Here am I, his own sister, with children of my own more or less of Rose's age, the

properly equipped and natural person to bring up this motherless and fatherless child, and instead she is left to the tender mercies of a young man—and an unmarried man—whose only claim is that he lived next door."

"Not his only claim," I suggested. "It is something to have known the family for many years and to have brought the child into the world."

"Mere accidents of adjacency and profession," said Mrs. Stratton.

I granted that, but added that chance could rarely be separated from destiny.

Mrs. Stratton hastened to assure me that she had no patience with mystical balderdash. In any case it was absurd that a busy unmarried doctor should be selected to train an orphan—and a female orphan at that—when the orphan's own aunt was not only ready to take over the duty but had been in the dead man's mind. She was convinced that ninety-nine out of every hundred men in my position would have the grace—the humanity—to stand aside and give close relationship precedence. She was also convinced that no decently honest judge, if there were such

a person, would hesitate to set the will aside and give her the custody of her own flesh and blood.

I doubted if the phrase "own flesh and blood" could be applied properly to nieces.

"It's near enough," said Mrs. Stratton. "There's no need to quibble about it. But to return to the question of a girl being entrusted to a young unmarried man, I consider it unsuitable in every way. It's not nice," she went on. "It's not proper. It's a kind of a scandal. The idea of a bachelor bringing up a girl!"

I pointed out that I was a little different from most men in being a doctor.

"A doctor!" she exclaimed, as though annihilating at one sniff not only every pretension I might have cherished to know anything of the healing art, but every vestige of discretion too, and all my predecessors from Galen onwards.

"At any rate," I said mildly, "I have been practising in this neighbourhood for a good many years and I succeeded a highly-esteemed father."

"And not without your reward," she returned. "It was worth having one of your patients, at any rate, if you could induce him to leave you his daughter and a nice little sum to play with."

"My dear!" said George from the sofa. "My dear!"

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Stratton. "I didn't mean to say that. You must excuse the feelings of a sister and—and an aunt. But," she continued, wasting no time in the nuances of regret, "at any rate you wouldn't think of accepting this trust if you didn't marry? You must realize that my poor brother had your marriage in mind when he made this preposterous will."

This was a new idea to me and it assorted ill with Allinson's expressed views as to the matrimonial state.

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"I know," she replied.

"But," I said, "I saw him more often and knew him more intimately in his latter days than you could have done. He gave me no hint of wishing to see me married. I could even give you a proof to the contrary, only I should not wish to run the risk of offending you."

Mrs. Stratton intimated that she should like to hear anything that her poor brother had said.

"Very well then," I replied. "He has often remarked what a relief it was to be able to come

over to me in the evening, to a house where there were no women about to have to be polite to."

"Disgracefull!" said Mrs. Stratton. "But his own dislike of refinement and the convenances is one thing; the bringing up of his daughter is another. I repeat that not even he would wish to leave his only child to the mercies of a bachelor. I claim to know something of his character," she went on: "we were girl and boy together. He would have added the clause to the will if he had been more himself. I am convinced of that."

"But he didn't," I pointed out. "One can take wills only as they are framed. Isn't that so, Stratton?"

"Except in very exceptional cases, yes," said George, with an heroic effort.

Mrs. Stratton became tearful and turned on her husband. "You never support me," she complained. "You allow any one to override me. As if I didn't know my own brother better than strangers could! His wish—more, his decision—would be that Dr. Greville should marry if he accepted the care of Rose. Of course you must marry," she added, to me. "How old are you?

—you look about thirty—every man of thirty should be married. There's always something wrong with bachelors. We can't allow—can we, George?—our niece to be brought up by a bachelor of thirty.”

“Many good men have been bachelors,” I said.

“Tell me one,” she replied, “and I shall be surprised.”

“Very well then,” I rejoined: “our Lord.”

“Don't be blasphemous,” she said.

“I was merely being historical,” I explained meekly.

“You have no right to compare yourself with Him,” she said. “It all helps to confirm my worst fears. I didn't intend to pass on to other matters connected with this deplorable affair; but that remark of yours has forced me to. Not only are you young and unmarried, but you treat sacred things with levity. I have not been prying, though you may think so—I should scorn the action—I have not been prying or asking questions, but I have learned that you are not a church-goer. And not just because you're a doctor either,” she added.

"It was not an excuse that I was about to make," I replied. "I should not be a church-goer whatever happened. It would involve suggestions of belief that I could not make and should not like to be dishonest about."

"An agnostic!" she said. "How terrible! O my poor Rose!" She began to be tearful.

"There are more agnostics than you know of," I said. "In this country, where religious questions are rarely asked and more rarely answered, no census of them could ever be taken. You probably not only know but esteem and trust scores of them."

To this she made no verbal reply but settled down steadily to sob.

"My dear Mrs. Stratton," I said. "You are taking the gloomiest view without the faintest reason. You might just as well look on the case brightly."

"Yes, yes," said George, who had gone to his wife's side and was stroking her with reassuring movements.

"You!" she said. "You're always siding against me! Come away. It is no use staying here or talking any more. Such selfishness I

never saw in all my life. But no good will come of it, I feel that. My poor little Rose, my poor little Rose!"

She returned to look at me with an intense yearning in her exceedingly damp features.

"I will not decide to-night," I said.

"I shall pray that you may have the best guidance," she assured me.

I thanked her.

"You shall know in the morning, early," I said, "how your prayers have been answered"; and she stumbled away, blind with tears.

George followed her, pausing only for a moment to inflict upon me one of those grasps in which man assures man of understanding and allegiance, and re-states the solidarity of sex. It hurt horribly, and I nursed my hand for some moments; but it was comforting too.

It was late when I went to bed, for there was much to do and plan. I was not too happy about the future and my new responsibilities, but one thought as I turned out the gas gave me the purest joy—and that was that I was not George Stratton.

Allinson had asked a great deal. It meant a kind of bondage for thirteen years—and the years between thirty-four, my present age, and forty-seven ought to be good ones. Should a young man dedicate them to a child not his own? Ordinarily a young man would not, but my case was not quite ordinary. A doctor automatically surrenders to his profession much of his youthfulness. Some one has said that the roystering medical student must be forgiven all when it is remembered how suddenly and completely he has, on qualification, to be changed into a staid, sober and punctual servant of the public for the rest of his days—yes and his nights. And I had always been a little old-fashioned, as we say, and the circumstance of succeeding to so big a practice so early, and being accepted favourably by so many of my father's patients, had not impaired this characteristic. I was therefore both by nature and by profession more of a predestined guardian of another man's child than most men even of forty-four are.

All the same, it was a tremendous responsibility, and it might result—I came back to this again and again—in a tremendous sacrifice. Because

if I agreed to be Rose's foster-father I should have to be thorough and absolute. She might in time go to school, but while she was my child she would be mine and no one else's. I could not share the duty of bringing her up. This means that the marriage upon which Mrs. Stratton had set her mind would not materialize. Whether or not celibacy was going to involve any kind of martyrdom for me I did not know; certainly up to the present time I had not fallen in love or felt in danger of doing so; and that is a good deal to say at thirty-four. But there were years ahead famous for their susceptibility.

And then, as to education, a girl, even when one can give her adequate attention, is a disquieting creature. One never knows of what she is thinking, as she sits there, knitting, or apparently poring over a book, or arranging flowers without a sound: more than thinking, plotting even. A boy is simpler. To begin with, he is rarely being still, and for the most part he wears his thoughts outside. As for a boy, if I had one to bring up I don't quite know what I should teach him, except that he must not step away from fast bowling and that it isn't fair to get into a railway

compartment where the only other passengers are a pair of lovers.

During a wakeful night my thoughts traversed the ground again and again, in unprogressive circles; but amid the dubieties that crowded on me this steady question periodically challenged me—Could you let her be brought up by that Stratton woman? Then, for the moment, I saw my course clear and shining; only however to lose it again when the gigantic difficulties of the task of education—made infinitely greater and more difficult by the fact that I was considering them in the small hours, when no man's judgment is well-balanced—arose to darken the future.

Thus pondering and fearing, I fell asleep.

How long I should have overslept, as the result of this earlier restlessness, had not some gravel rattled on the window, I cannot say. I hastened to it and peered out. The sun was high, the scent of the garden came up warm and fresh, and just below me was Rose herself, all strange and pathetic in her stiff black clothes, lifting her transparent little face upwards and calling "Dombeen, Dombeen. Oh I do want you so."

How could I have disregarded such a sign?

Was it not an answer to Mrs. Stratton's prayer?

"I have decided finally to take charge of Rose, as her father wished," I wrote to Mrs. Stratton before she left for her own home.

My first duty now was to secure Hannah Banks; because it would be necessary for Rose to have a nurse and steady companion, and I had never cared greatly for the one in Allinson's employ.

Hannah Banks, who years before had been my own nurse, was now in retirement at Lowestoft, living with a married niece on the annuity that my father had left her; but she expressed her willingness to re-enter service, and a day or so later her motherly old face beamed once more upon me.

"To think of you," said Hannah, "bringing up a child—and a little girl at that—without any one to help! The idea! Of course I came. I'm not as strong as I used to be, but thank God, I'm tough."

Rose took to her instantly, and they established

themselves in a wing of the house, which, for too long much too big for me, was now becoming human again. Hannah was vigilant but not fussy: her especial qualities were a kind heart and an unsleeping thoughtfulness. She could hardly write her own name, and her reading was confined to the simplest words; but what are reading and writing compared with the conduct of life? What I wanted from Hannah was wholesome solicitude and old English simplicity; I could supply the rest myself, and later on there would be some regular lessons.

The fact that Hannah had stood in the relation of nurse also to me made her a little contemptuous of my present parental airs. You can't bring up a boy from the cradle to boarding-school without detecting lapses from the god, and these can be remembered even when he is adult and your employer. Nor, after bringing up a boy like that, can you ever quite lose the feeling that he is still something of an infant. Since, to nice women, all men are still something of infants (and, if sensible, willing to be so), this does not ordinarily matter; but the attitude may lead to embarrassing results when one is endeavouring

to cut a figure of authority with a child of one's own or in one's own charge. How can a lecture on hygiene be effective when in the middle of it an officious old lady crosses the lawn with a pair of goloshes in her hands, and says, "Now, Master Julius, put these on directly. The grass is wringing wet!" For I was still Master Julius to Hannah.

There was, besides Hannah, Suzanne. It was one of my peculiarities—and how the countryside came to forgive it, I never understood—to employ a French cook. I had found her on a walking tour with Theodore Allinson in Normandy in 1880; she was keeping a wayside inn near Lillebonne, and her husband having just died, and there being no children, she longed to get away to a totally new environment. She was then about thirty-two. Since she made wonderful soups out of nothing and could set a perfect omelette before you almost before the order was given, I suggested that she might like to try

England and take service with me; and she jumped at the idea; and with me she remained, capable, quick and amusing.

Her French was far from the French of Paris, but she had the rapid Parisian gift of commentary, with a homely provincial sagacity added. The acquirement of English she disdained, but just as sailors go round the world on the one word "savvy," so did she, with a similar economy, contrive to make herself understood in the house and the village. Indeed, she went farther than to refuse to acquire English, she forced French on us, so that, for example, we entirely gave up "going to bed": we used instead to "alley coshy."

Rose was devoted to Suzanne and she assimilated a large number of her phrases—all of which, I knew only too well, would have to be unlearned when she came under the control of a real Mademoiselle. But for the present it was more important that the child should be happy with this broad-bosomed kindly Norman, and whatever bad pronunciation she was getting was more than compensated for by the attainment of certain secrets of the cuisine. Suzanne could not read

a word, but the last atom of flavour was conserved in every dish that she sent to table; and what is literature compared with cooking? One is shadow and the other is substance. She had no culture. In vain for her had her fellow Norman, Gustave Flaubert (whose statue she had no doubt seen in Rouen), toiled all his life after the elusive epithet; but her apple-jelly was more than novels and her salads were works of art. I used to look at her, serene among her pots and pans or gathering lettuces in the garden, and reflect again how little education has to do with the real progress of the world or the happiness of mankind.

Naturally enough, Hannah did not appreciate Suzanne. Like a good rural Englishwoman, she mistrusted all foreigners in general, and in the present case the feeling was aggravated by jealousy, and by pique that her own darling Rose could understand the foreigner's gibberish where she herself could not. But the house was so managed that the two women seldom met. Hannah ate in her and Rose's own rooms, while Suzanne rarely left the kitchen.

I have said something of Rose's infirmary for crippled animals. With these creatures and Hannah and Suzanne and the maids and Briggs and myself, she would have had company enough; but there were others always ready to listen to her. There was, for instance, Mr. Wellicum.

In those primitive days I not only prescribed medicines but supplied them, and Mr. Wellicum was my dispenser, as he had been my father's before me. He had seemed an old man when I was Rose's age and ventured into his aromatic domain, and to her therefore he must have worn an air of extreme antiquity. There was this difference in his attitude to the two of us: he had disliked, or at any rate discouraged, my visits, but he rejoiced to have Rose about him. He was a short, bow-legged, grizzled man, very hairy and ursine, known to the villagers as "Crusty Bob," and by playing tricks on him the boys increased his bearishness; but to Rose he was the mildest and most subservient slave. Others, including myself, his timid employer, were allowed in the dispensary itself only with ungracious reluctance —the lobby by the trap-door in the window being

the place of the public—but Rose could do as she wished there, always on the one condition that she must not taste. He even permitted her to help in pill rolling, and not a few of the village children have been known to beg her collusion in seeing that their physic was made less nasty.

Those were the days before motor-cars—I did not see a motor-car until I was well over forty or own one until I was fifty—when a country doctor and his horse were allies and friends. I rode a little, but mostly drove, and Silver and I were on terms of the closest intimacy. She was a chestnut mare with a white-grey mane and tail: hence her name.

Speed, no doubt, is a great asset, especially for a busy doctor in a straggling district, but I shall always hold that we lost spiritually more than we gained materially when we substituted machinery for the horse. The horse, the school-book used to tell us, is the friend of man; and man needs friends. Petrol is his servant or his master,

even his tyrant; petrol smoothes no difficulties, heals no wounds, restores no vitality, as a horse could do. On the other hand, justice compels me to admit that it has taken me to many a sick-bed at a pace that Silver would have thought unjust and have found impossible. In addition to Silver I had a bay mare named Jenny, as a second string. Both were affectionate and gentle, and Rose adored them and took astonishing and terrifying liberties with them. Some part of the ritual of grooming, in which she was proud to assist, she even carried into her own toilet. The peculiar hissing sound which ostlers make when they are curry-combing, Rose used to imitate (Hannah told me, with tears of mirth) as she brushed her hair.

That part of the ancient Persians' simple system of education for their sons which bore upon the management of a horse (to shoot straight, manage a horse, and tell the truth, was the complete curriculum) is being missed to-day. I don't pretend that Rose could manage one in the full sense of the word, but she had the qualities which such mastery demands—courage and confidence, mental quickness and sympathy, and a steady

hand. It is not to a country's good when the horse disappears and oil and metal take its place, for the management of a car is far less educational. To-day, roughly speaking, only farm-boys and stable-lads are being taught as the wise old Persians would wish.

Then there were the neighbours: the Rector and his family; Colonel Westerley and his wife; the old people at the post office, and the butcher and the baker, and, what is more to the point, the butcher's and the baker's errand boys. Rose was on the best of terms with all of these.

Some were too anxious to share in her upbringing. I exempt the butcher's boy and the baker's boy from this charge, and the old couple at the post office are honourably acquitted—or as honourably as persons can be who repeat telegrams to the whole village—but the Rector's wife longed for Rose to join her two daughters in their lessons, and Mrs. Westerley was consumed by a desire to transform her into a pianist. The

rectory offer I declined, but Rose sat for a while at Mrs. Westerley's instrument, until it was decided that whatever genius she might possess lay in some other direction than music.

Mrs. Westerley, whose garden marched with mine on the other side, we could do without; but Colonel Westerley was one of Rose's special intimates. And when I say Colonel, I mean Colonel. I mean an elderly upright man with a white moustache and courtly manners, who took the chair at meetings, and played a good game of croquet, and acted as sidesman on Sundays; the kind of army aristocrat who, by presenting the plate with a certain military éclat, made it a double privilege for the worshipper to drop in a shilling for God. I have to explain and amplify in this way because now, after the War, when I am writing, the word Colonel means nothing of the kind. Mere youths are Colonels. A major called on me yesterday with a smooth-shaven white face and a baggy umbrella, to ask for my signature to some teetotal appeal. If I had trodden on his toe he would very likely have said that it was his fault. The word "Gad" has quitted the language.

Colonel Westerley had all the mildness and Christianity that, in some odd way, can seed in the composition of a certain kind of army man, to blossom forth in his retirement. One does not notice the seeding, but the flowers are very visible. He had been in India most of his life: had quelled border insurrections and killed his country's foes without a tremor; but now, among the croquet hoops and William Allen Richardsons, he was the soul of gentle courtesy and the Rector's right-hand layman. The Colonel took over my "Times" at half-price at three o'clock every afternoon, and we shared a library subscription. Mrs. Westerley knitted continually for bazaars, and read aloud every evening until it was time for Patience and then bed.

Rose and the Colonel were great friends. I used to see her watching him as he pruned and grafted, and asking him searching questions as to the perils of life in India. When he corroborated her suspicions and stated that it was really true that snakes got into the bath through the hole that lets the water out, she instituted a hostility to enter that receptacle and be washed all over that was very distressing to her nurse.

The Colonel's stories of man-eating tigers had less serious results. The very good case which he made for himself as an intrepid fighting man and terror of the Jungle deteriorated, however, when Rose discovered one day that he had not a single Indian coin to display to her. To see a rupee in the flesh, so to speak, had suddenly become a necessity, second only to that of beholding a real live anna, which she associated in some curious way with Hannah Banks; and the incompetent old warrior had neither. How one could leave India and not bring any such souvenirs away, Rose could not comprehend. An ivory model of the Taj Mahal, proffered in lieu of coinage, had no effect whatever, not even when fortified by the Colonel's word-picture of the original by moonlight.

I hardly need say that many of my patients, even the serious ones, took the liveliest interest in Rose, and since nothing is so vexing to the matron and even the spinster as the spectacle of

a single man bringing up a young girl, I was naturally well supplied with advice. All my patients asked about her, but as for the hypochondriacs, they made Rose a staple of conversation—conversation being their principal requirement from a doctor. Having reported on the progress of their hypothetical maladies, they got to work at once on Rose's progress. What was she doing? What was she reading? Had I any new amusing remarks of hers to repeat?

I must not give the impression that I was wilfully taking fees from these people for nothing. They had just enough discomfort or fear of illness to warrant the request that I should add them to my visiting list, and I was never an Abernethy, to call them humbugs and refuse to waste my time under their roofs; but with less money or more to do with they would have forgotten my existence. Indolence and riches, in others, are the medical profession's best friends.

A country doctor in those days was valued for his sociability as much almost as for his skill, and there are cases when a pleasantry or two can do more good than the whole pharmacopœia. If he can see the opportunity of being useful as a

mind-doctor as well as the ordinary repairer of disordered bodies, I think that the practitioner should embrace it and take a fee for it without a blush.

My own circle of semi-friendly patients was large. There was Mrs. O'Gorman, for instance. Mrs. O'Gorman was the widow of an Irish landlord, a little lady, then between fifty and sixty, with a great gift of shrewdness and no belief in mincing her words, who was just sufficiently rheumatic to get three half-hours a week of my society, and perhaps an extra one if I chanced to be passing that way on an irregular day. She lived in luxury in a big house, with a companion called Julia, and read everything that was published both in books and periodicals; and everything that she read reminded her of something. You know the allusive Irish mind leaping from branch to branch; well, she had that, and a marvellous memory at the back of it. But whatever might be her theme, she always came back to Rose, who now and then was deposited at her house by me in the morning and picked up on my return from my rounds, replete with exotic food and burdened with gifts.

"And how's the colleen to-day?" Mrs. O'Gorman would say, after the latest ravages wrought by uric acid on her system had been carefully described. "Damn the stuff! What's it for, anyway? Just to keep doctors in affluence, I suppose. If the good God had asked me to help Him in making the world, which I'd take shame to put my signature to as it is, I'd have left uric acid out of it. Yes, and doctors too! Every doctor is a confession of failure on the Creator's part.

"Have you read the article in the 'Nineteenth Century' on Genesis? Is it the 'Nineteenth Century,' Julia, or the 'Contemporary'? It doesn't matter which, they're both half a crown and not worth it. The man sweeps away the Garden of Eden like dust on a piano. And that reminds me, we're going to London to hear Arpeggio. They say he's better than Liszt, although he has short hair. But he's a devil among the ladies, just the same.

"It's odd, isn't it, how these musicians—Julia, go and get the Doctor a glass of sherry and some cake—it's odd, isn't it, that no woman can resist them? Now, a fiddler I can understand. He

stands up to it and makes those fine movements with his delicate hands; but a pianist, all bent over the box, banging away—what can they see in him?

“And tell me, what are you doing about Rose’s music? She ought to be taking lessons. A girl’s out of it if she can’t play some instrument, and it’s useful too if a dance should be improvised. Let’s see—has she good arms? If she has, she ought to play the fiddle, or the harp, only the harp’s so clumsy to take about. You want a cab every time. But it’s a lovely instrument. I heard Jenny Lind sing to a harp—the sweetest voice. There’s some fellow in the ‘Saturday Review’ this week says that Patti has never been approached: but Jenny Lind was worth a thousand of her. Patti has too much art: you notice it; Jenny Lind made you forget everything but the music. Has Rose any voice? I must get her to sing to me when you bring her over next. But you bring her so seldom.

“There’s no need to be jealous of me, you know, I’m only an old woman. But you’ll be getting jealous of all the men directly; you won’t be able to help it. Every day she’s growing up,

you know, and every day some boy you've probably never heard of is growing up too—you don't know where he is, and Rose doesn't know, and he's never heard of Rose. There he is, somewhere, in his little Eton jacket, with big ears and a snub nose as likely as not, and every minute he's drawing nearer to Rose and she's drawing nearer to him. And neither of them knowing a thing about it! Isn't that terrible? Just Fate arranging everything and we all out in the cold; and no one so out in the cold as the parents and guardians!

"And what about yourself?" she went on, for she was remorseless where the relations of the sexes were concerned. "How old are you? Thirty-five, shall we say? And Rose is seven. Ah! Then when she's twenty you'll be forty-eight—the dangerous age! That's the time for you to look out, Doctor. You'll want all your strength of mind then, because we mustn't marry our wards, you know."

"Mrs. O'Gorman!" I protested.

"Nonsense!" she went on. "What's the matter with facing the facts? If every one would do it this world would be a sweeter place. But

why don't you marry, anyway? What's the matter with us? Do you hate us?"

"I'm too busy," I said. "Life is too full."

"Wait till you lose your pretty Rosy, and then you'll be feeling the draught," she retorted. "Ah, Doctor, Doctor, it's a sad old age you're building up for yourself; and you don't play cards either. A sad old age!"

"Doctors shouldn't have wives any more than actors should," I would say. "No one should marry unless he is going to keep some kind of hours; and doctors can't. Not at least until they're specialists and receive patients in Harley Street from ten to one; and by that time they're crystallized fossils. Parsons should marry—and, as a matter of fact, conspicuously do so—and stockbrokers and lawyers and country squires and most other people; but not doctors."

"Well, it's just as well for my rheumatism that your father had different views," was the reply. "Not that you do me any good," she hastened to add, "but it's comforting to have a doctor about the place, and you're something to talk to. You listen well."

So she would run on.

But she did not talk like this when Rose was with her. She drew then on her memory and fancy for all that was gay and amusing; brought out old scrap-books; disinterred a musical-box from the lumber-room; and had an amazing ancient dolls'-house put into thorough repair both inside and out. Rose was happier with Mrs. O'Gorman than with any one but, I hope, me.

I had, of course, patients in whose houses I should not care for Rose to be intimate; and it was not easy for me to repel their friendly advances. But Rose was capable, if she met them when out walking, of replying to overtures with the firmest refusals. Child as she was, she knew her own mind, and she was not old enough or weak enough to have any preoccupation with the feelings of others. It was not callousness: not at all; but it was not in her nature to adapt herself—not yet, nor would it ever be to any great extent, except for the most serious reasons. She was in a playground, and her play had so far

always been with congenial spirits; why should it be otherwise? So she felt.

I had been brought up differently. I had been brought up to think of others; to spare sensibilities even to the extent of prevarication; to say "No" where I would rather have said "Yes" if I thought that "No" would be more agreeable to the other person involved: to pass the salt; to be self-denying. Rose's father had no such attitude towards others, nor did he impose it on his daughter. He had considered the world his orange, and Rose was disposed to do the same. She had no tendency to be grasping or greedy; she had that sense of hospitality to which politeness is a corollary; while her good humour and sense of fun and laughter also made her naturally a dispenser of happiness. But nothing prevented her from telling the truth, neither fear nor favour. How I used to envy her this!

Every teacher must learn something from the taught, I suppose, though it be only an idea of his own ignorance. And I found myself learning from Rose all the time. Her simplicities rebuked my complexities; her innocence disturbed my sophistication. But most I learned from her

not only the importance of truth-telling in the social system, but the superior excellence of it in the difficult scheme of civilized life. By always telling the truth one saves oneself from a multitude of fatiguing cares. I don't say that Rose knew this, even subconsciously; she told the truth because it was in her nature. But it might also have been her privilege. Of all people, a pretty woman has least reason to put herself to the trouble of inventions; because she would always be forgiven.

It was of course too late for me to become truthful spontaneously, as Rose could be; but under her influence, child as she was and fully grown man (if any man is ever fully grown) as I was, I learned to think twice and be truthful on the second thought. I learned too, through her unconscious tuition, that other people's feelings are rarely as delicate as we fancy them, and often never worth serious consideration; at any rate, that the health of one's own soul is more important than the comfort of any one else.

I speak of myself as a teacher, but I had dispensed no formal instruction. Whatever Rose got from me was in the ordinary course of conver-

sation, at breakfast and in the garden and at odd times, and perhaps particularly at night, when she had gone to bed and I sat with her for half an hour and, according to Hannah, excited her little brain. I am sure that I have advised thousands of parents not to overdo the good-night gossip; but doctors rarely practise what they preach.

I used to read to her too; and if she had not wanted the same stories so often we might have consumed hundreds of books together. Ruskin's "King of the Golden River" (does any one read that now?) was one of her favourites, and I could not substitute a word in it without being detected. That legend is, of course, a lesson too.

All that I had to offer was a *gradus* to life. The real instructors would come later, with their geography and history and mathematics and languages and so forth. The most that I hoped for was that, indirectly, the effect of my general attitude to things might be that Rose someday would be able to avoid a few pitfalls. To get positive qualities into another is more difficult than to implant a certain caution. "Oh, you men are all alike!" I felt that if I could make it impossible for Rose ever to say that, I should have

done something far better than to fill her mind with facts and figures.

Among all the trivialities of our life together in those early days it is difficult to make a selection of saliences. Rose was not a remarkable child in any way, except perhaps in the lack of special qualities. She was quiet and self-contained and, I used to think, very sensible: perhaps her general good sense was her strongest point. She was not a universal sympathizer, but where her affections were set she was very tenacious in her kindnesses and even tendernesses. I remember an incident which illustrates this characteristic.

We had at that time a dog named Rex, a Clumber spaniel, which all too seldom I took out shooting. He was called mine, but in reality was Rose's, fixing himself to her like a shadow, and being miserable when she was out and he not allowed to go too.

Well, one evening at the time when Rose took

out his great dish of broken victuals, Rex was nowhere to be found. He had never strayed before, and we had no cheering theory to propound to the child to account for his conduct. Other theories we kept to ourselves, such as the possibility of a thief having enticed Rex away or that he had followed a hare into preserved ground and had got into a trap, or even had been shot. A new keeper on one of the neighbouring estates had been heard to vow extermination to any dog that he caught trespassing.

No one allowed Rose to hear conjectures of this kind, but we all rather obviously shared her anxiety, and she was able to see through our forced airs of assurance.

The hours went on, and still no Rex. Rose's bedtime came and was long passed, but she would not consent to leave the hall door. There she stood, now and then calling, with the dish of food beside her.

Hannah was furious, but to no purpose. Dogs to her were just dogs—four-footed creatures, useful to bark at night and protect the house, but given to importing mud into houses and not blameless as to the encouragement of fleas. Many

a conflict have we had, she and I, over Rex's charter to roam where he would, upstairs or down. On this occasion we came to a wider cleavage than ever, for Hannah (and, from her point of view, very rightly) wished Rose to go to bed, whereas I, although conscious that as a habit such vigils would be very bad for her, was inclined to accede to her tearful wishes and allow her on this occasion to wait up. Such evidences of solicitude for her dog were very gratifying.

"I can't go to bed, Dombeen, until I know," she said, and she had my sympathy.

"You shall stay up," I assured her, "till—till—"

"Till he comes back?" she supplied eagerly.

"No, I couldn't promise that," I said. "You see, he may have been found wandering by some one who has tied him up till the morning and will then bring him home. And you couldn't wait up till then, could you?"

"Yes I could," said Rose.

"Well even if you could, I couldn't let you," I said. "But you shall stay up till—till midnight, say. Till the clock strikes twelve."

"Oh no, later than that," said Rose. "Mayn't I wait till three?"

We compromised upon half-past one, and Hannah's opinion of me sank still lower.

"Calls himself a doctor!" I fancy I heard her muttering.

Meanwhile, in his devotion, old Wellicum was scouring the neighbourhood in one direction, and Briggs in another, and the stable-boy in a third.

They straggled back at about midnight, and at half-past one I moved the closure and we all went to bed, fearing the worst.

It was just three when I was awakened by a furious knocking at the door and a joyous voice crying, "Dombeen, Dombeen, he's come back!"

And so he had, the rascal, after what we discovered later to have been simply a distant amatory expedition.

Rose, it seems, although she had consented to go to bed, had got up again and had been sitting by the window until she had seen love's pilgrim creep in.

Downstairs we went, in our dressing-gowns, and fed him and petted him as though he were a hero instead of a mere voluptuary. What kind

of a welcome Rex had expected, and what he thought of the surprising turn that things had taken and our manifestations of delight, I can only guess, but being a Clumber he probably laughed long when at last he regained his kennel.

It was when Rose was ten or eleven that the Hall, the big house of the place, with a park around it, was bought by Sir Edmund Fergusson, and local society was enriched by the addition of his family, which consisted of Lady Fergusson and their only child, Ronald, or Ronnie, who was about Rose's own age.

The Fergussons naturally became my patients. Sir Edmund's trouble was gout, which, like most gouty people, he did nothing consistently to check. Sporadically he was careful in his diet, but then would arrive a temptation that he could not resist. A large part of all doctors' lives is taken up in scolding gouty patients for their imprudences and patching them up into a condition to commit more.

Ronnie Fergusson had a tutor at that time, and Rose a governess; and neither instructor was inclined to extend the working hours unreasonably. During the playing hours the two children were much together. They had a crow's nest in one of the Fergussons' trees, and an empty furnace-pit under a disused greenhouse of mine served them as a robbers' cave.

Ronnie's parents having married late, he was more like their grandson than son, and therefore a little lonely, and Rose's companionship was exactly what his nature needed.

Until Rose was thirteen I knew nothing but serenity in my foster-fatherhood. But then she gave me a shock. It turned out to be a false alarm in that it set up no precedent, but for a while I was nervous.

I had decided to send her to school. Were my own pleasure the only consideration I should have kept her at home, but a girl ought to be among others, to learn give-and-take, adjust-

ment, and so forth. Thirteen was late, of course, but she was not quite like other girls—an only child is always a little different—and the lateness did not matter.

In practical matters she already knew more than any of her teachers could tell her. She knew a good deal about medicine and the care of invalids, derived principally from Hannah, but a little from me; she had presided at the tea-table for years and prepared the infusion like a Chinese philosopher; she could make an omelette. She had a considerable store of Norman patois. She had read countless books, many of them far beyond her years. It would probably have been better if she continued to remain at home; but she was too normal to be denied ordinary procedure, or I was too normal to have the courage to deny it her.

After many fruitless inquiries and inconvenient visits, I had allowed Mrs. Stratton to find Rose a school. It was at Brighton, where more young people seem to be taught than, judging by the passivity of the fishermen on the railings, fish are drawn from the sea; and I was assured that there was no more admirable establishment,

and that Miss Saltoun was the last word in sympathetic and cultured head-mistress-ship. I went to see her and was more or less satisfied. Not wholly; but having had no experience as a selector of educationalists, I let it go, especially as I was more than pleased with the material conditions of the building—light, air, and so forth.

Rose and I had a silent breakfast on the fatal day. She had been looking forward to it with mixed feelings, sometimes glad to be joining such a company of girls after so much isolation, sometimes forlorn indeed at the thought of leaving her home. On the last evening she had broken down completely; but in the morning she wore an expression of grim resolution, which I admired too much to run the risk of dissolving it by talking about any unsafe subject; and no subject seeming to be safe, I said nothing.

Her farewell to the household was tearful; but she pulled herself together to part bravely from me, and then she and Hannah drove off. It was a double breaking up of tradition; for Hannah, after taking her to Paddington and putting her into the hands of Mrs. Stratton, who would convoy her to Victoria, where there were

reserved compartments for the school, was to go on to her home at Lowestoft, alas! for ever. She had been growing more infirm and could no longer manage the stairs, and when Rose came back for the holidays there was to be a new maid for her, instead of our old friend. It was part of the new programme that Rose was to be generally more self-reliant.

More self-reliant!

It was on a Tuesday that Rose departed. Just as I was finishing my soup on the following Thursday evening, who should walk in but Rose and fling herself on her knees beside me and shake with sobs?

There she knelt, with my hand on her head trying to allay the storm, for minutes.

"O Dombeen!" she managed at last to say. "I couldn't stay there. It's—it's—horrid. You wouldn't like me to stay there. Really you wouldn't."

The fact that I didn't ask her to explain, that I took it for granted that she was right, will indicate at once the kind of fatalist that I was, and our sub-conscious terms of understanding.

Rose was tired out—too tired to eat—and I

am afraid that in the absence of Hannah, whose loss was a terrible disappointment—for although Rose had known of it she had not fully realized it—she cried herself to sleep.

I don't pretend to have had much of a night's rest myself, for such a false start as this was no part of the educational programme. Theodore's phrase, "bring her up to beat the band," rang in my ears.

Was this beating the band? On the face of it, no. We must not run away. And yet (I argued) to run away often implies more character than to endure, and surely that was Rose's case. She was not a coward, she was not self-indulgent; that I knew. Nor did she imagine things. Child as she was, I trusted her judgment and accepted the position. The school was horrid and she couldn't stay there; that was enough. I knew her sufficiently well to be sure that she would have put up with it if she had believed that any good could result; but she knew the reverse and she had acted accordingly. She had walked out of the house, found her way to the station, and the pocket-money I had given her and her own resourcefulness had done the rest.

The next morning I had a very pale and demure companion at breakfast. She also had evidently been thinking, and had seen that thus to take the law into her own hands was a proceeding of considerable magnitude—such magnitude that she looked dwarfed under it. But although subdued and *pianissimo*, there was no sign of weakness on her features. It may have been a gigantic effort of independence, but she did not regret it.

I had sent to Brighton a reassuring telegram (crossing one from Osborne House) on the previous evening, and on the arrival of a second telegram from Miss Saltoun saying that she was on her way to see me, I dispatched Rose to Mrs. O'Gorman's for the day, with an explanatory note.

Not long afterwards a very indignant Miss Saltoun arrived for an interview. Her idea no doubt was to take Rose back with her; but I had no intention of permitting that. I did not even let them meet, to Miss Saltoun's intense surprise. Should she be still alive, I doubt if her eyebrows have yet resumed their normal level, to

such an altitude did she lift them when I announced my decision.

"But it is fatal to let a child behave like this," she said. "It is the end of all discipline. What would come to the world if no one were punished?"

I said that Rose would not lack punishment. Her shame in not being able to remain at Brighton was punishment. She was not proud of herself at all, I said, even though she couldn't do anything else but run away.

"But suppose every child ran away!" said Miss Saltoun. "What would the world come to!"

"It would probably be very good for the world," I said. "Because only children with character have the pluck to take such a step."

"No one has ever run away from Osborne House before," said Miss Saltoun.

"And probably no one ever will again," I said.

"It will be very damaging to me," she protested, "if it gets to be known, as of course it must do. Of what did Rose complain?"

I said that I hadn't asked her.

"Not asked her!" Miss Saltoun exclaimed.

And I could see her swiftly putting two and two together and realizing that it was my deplorable indulgence that was at the back of everything.

"No," I said. "She merely said that she could not stay and had therefore come home."

"And you allow that? Condone that? It's too amazing! Is every caprice of a child like this to satisfy you?"

"I don't think she is capricious," I said. "I agree with you that the occurrence is unfortunate. I wish it had never been. I wish Rose had not gone to school at all, anywhere. But I would much rather—even at the risk of being unfair to you—that she were not interrogated."

Miss Saltoun kept her temper under fair control, but she could not help indicating that she was glad that all her pupils had not such impossible parents or foster-parents, and that on the whole she was of the opinion that she was well out of it.

Nor did I feel particularly pleased with the position I had been forced to take up. It was not too civil, and I doubt if it was just to the schoolmistress. But Rose was my first consideration, and I knew with crystal clearness that no

possible good to either could come out of a cross-examination of her by Miss Saltoun. Miss Saltoun would have been hostile and suspicious, utterly incapable of understanding the child's fundamental honesty and courage, nor would she have had any belief that a child's antipathies, a child's dislike of Dr. Fell, need not be less sincere or important than an adult's. To her, children were immature beings to be taught deportment and the length of rivers; to me, Rose was an individual, separate and complete, with private sensitivenesses and loyalties that must not be harmed.

Miss Saltoun caught her train, and I drove over to Mrs. O'Gorman to fetch Rose back. I had sent her there for the day, to be out of the way and also to be in the company of the most sensible woman I knew.

I found them turning over old volumes of "Punch," and having sent Rose off to help Julia in some capacity or other, Mrs. O'Gorman turned to me with a smile on her mischievous old face.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish," I remarked.

"You ought to be proud of yourself," she said.

"Why?"

"To have brought her up so well. I don't mean what you've taught her, but to have left so much resolution in her. Most people knock it out."

"More chance than design," I said.

"Anyway, she's got it," said Mrs. O'Gorman, "and if she always obeys impulse and cuts her losses so promptly she won't go far wrong. Her heart's true."

"Meanwhile?" I asked.

"Meanwhile," she said, "she wants to go to school. When I say 'wants' I mean something very different; I mean she's willing to go to school and she knows she ought to go to school. She doesn't think, and she won't admit (you see I've been testing her) she did wrong to run away from this one—and I agree with her—but she knows that if she stayed at home now it would be a victory wrongly won. And she doesn't want to do anything unfair, bless her! although, of course, she'll have to before she's through. The world will see to that!"

"What school?" I asked.

"Well, that's your affair," said Mrs. O'Gorman, "but, this time, for the love of God find it yourself. How you came to let that Stratton

woman pick out the other for you I shall never understand. And you more or less a sensible fellow too! But there, we've all got our blind spots. Even I can't bring myself to change my medical adviser."

At her next school Rose was happy and did well.

While she was away, I gave more time to an old toy of mine—the microscope—and was gradually, I doubt not, becoming a fossil. I was beginning also to supplement the collection of prints which my father had left, and buying experience rather dearly. Between the holidays these were my indoor hobbies, while there was always the garden for such daylight hours as my patients left me. Now and then I dined out, at the Hall or the Rectory or with Mrs. O'Gorman; and so the time wore on. To be creatures of habit seems to be our destiny, and if we are to escape we must continually fight. Personally, I did not fight. I was counting on Rose to be my

deliverer when, at the end of her last school term, she returned to galvanize her old foster-father and keep him gay once more.

Every time Rose came home, three times a year, I saw a change in her, but it was not until the winter holidays when she was nearly sixteen that I suddenly realized that she had grown into a beautiful creature, capable of setting men's hearts beating, and of disturbing lives and affecting destinies. Not, of course, that one has to be beautiful to affect destiny: we can all do that, and all are doing it continually. But pretty women appear to be busier than other persons, even if they are not.

There had been a week of clear skies and pure sunshine, and an east wind blowing with sufficient nippiness to keep the ice hard. Rose had been skating every day with various neighbours, and she and two or three young fellows were now walking up the drive jangling their skates and laughing. Her high gaiters made her look unusually tall, and she came along with her easy long stride like a conqueror, her face glowing under the frost and her eyes alight with merriment. She wore a fur cap and a fur jacket with

a high collar, and you know what furs can do for even a plain woman. Rose's vivid animation was almost fire; but what struck me most was a new confidence, unconscious but visible, and the deference and competitive eagerness which were expressed in her companions. When I had seen her last, at lunch, she had been a girl; now, only three hours later, she was an influence.

I don't suggest that from that moment her life was more mature; I don't think that with any steadiness it was; but the dominant woman had flashed out for a moment, and I never forgot the apparition.

In those days, although Rose had several boy satellites, who seemed to me, with not too numerous opportunities of observing them closely, to be on terms of a very simple natural intimacy with her, chief of them was still Ronnie Ferguson. He was her most constant companion, dropping in oftener than the others, and taking her on longer expeditions or more frequently joining in our games at home, whether indoors or out. Although I was in the forties I was active on the tennis lawn, and at billiards I could beat any one in the neighbourhood. I had been coach-

ing Rose and finding her a much better pupil than I ever expected: perhaps the vanity in her stimulated her to try the harder, for there were mirrors at each end of the room in which she could see herself, and there is hardly a stroke in the game which does not emphasize the beauty of arms and hands. Ronnie was a billiard enthusiast too, but I kept Rose ahead of him, and they became very keen combatants. He was at my house after dinner on most evenings during the holidays.

Ronnie's parents we did not much care for. Sir Edmund Fergusson, who was now retired, had been a northern manufacturer and mayor: a roughish *nouveau-riché*, with a great desire to assimilate county manners and play as naturally as possible his new rôle of squire. Lady Fergusson was an ordinary motherly woman, with a good deal of pride in her husband and a touch of the snob. Both adored their son, but whereas Lady Fergusson showed her feelings, Sir Edmund disguised his.

Ronnie, although not to that status born, had become a typical English public-school boy with an easy manner, a delight in fun and a merry

hair-trigger laugh. Good to look at too, with his fair hair and lightly-tanned skin and very white teeth. He did not suggest any great force of character: his blunt little nose was against that; but he seemed to be an epitome of affection and good humour, and was likely to succeed in the world by reason of an inherent popularity. The kind of boy and man that others who might reasonably be envious would go out of their way to serve, just to have a smile of gratitude and to enjoy the sensation of having benefited a persuasive creature. However rich Ronnie might become he would receive more; because of those who have, and to whom therefore is given, he was among the most attractive.

The world is a strange place; and why some of us are born so that we may not look over a hedge, while others may steal a whole remount camp and escape censure, no one will ever understand. But Ronnie was high among the immune horse-thieves.

He did things well, too. He played games well and looked his best in flannels. Our village cricket team, which languished through the early weeks of the season and was too often beaten,

rallied when Ronnie came home for the holidays and had its sweet revenge in the return matches. If Rose was still defeating him at billiards it was because her tactics were better. She had more strategy.

The Ronnies of the world usually marry young and go fairly happily through their wedded life. This perhaps is because their attraction is neither for very clever women nor for decadents, but for the jolly. The sporting, adventurous—I might almost say picnic—element in young people's marriages lasts with these longer than with more serious or more brilliant or more passionate couples.

There was, however, no outward sign of anything deeper than the best good-fellowship between Ronnie and Rose. They liked and laughed, and handed each other the half-butt, and there it remained.

But a year later there were developments.

England is no country for the skating enthu-

siasm, and Rose continually mentioned her desire to spend the following Christmas holidays—her last—at one of the winter-sport centres in Switzerland. To be away at that time of year, when maladies are most flourishing, was no easy or prudent course for me; but Rose was set upon it, and one can always get a locum tenes if one really wants to, and I had not played truant for a long while and might be all the better for it after; and so I agreed.

The next thing was—Ronnie must come too. Ronnie, who was now at Sandhurst, was far more eager to spend his holidays with us than at the Hall; and the dream of his life was to be in some place where you could count on the frost lasting till to-morrow. It is always a mystery to me how in our island, with the gulf stream persistently paying attentions to it, any one learns to skate at all. Ronnie, however, had had the chance to become a good skater, and he longed to be better and to do some skiing and bob-sleighing too. Rose shared his enthusiasm.

I must admit to feeling doubtful as to whether it was the wisest thing to take a boy of eighteen and a girl of seventeen to Switzerland in this

way; but the fact that their minds were so exclusively set on open air activities reassured me. And the Fergussons made no objections, beyond expressing the regret that their only son should wish to be away for Christmas.

None the less I carried the matter to Mrs. O'Gorman's tribunal; for when in doubt I invariably adopted that procedure.

"Take them? Of course you'll take them," she said. "Or rather, they'll take you. And it's high time you got away from this mouldy corner and allowed some mountain air to get into your fusty old brain!"

"Is it so fusty?" I asked.

"Of course it is. How can it be anything else, considering the life you lead? Sitting by the bedsides of bores; prescribing physic; talking weather; pottering about within a radius of five miles when there's the whole big world waiting for you. I've no great opinion of you, as you know, but you've got the best brains in the place—London brains, in short—and you do nothing with them. Perhaps when you see Mont Blanc you'll get a little ambition. I don't want you to leave us, but I want you to do something besides

patching up our twopenny-halfpenny bodies.
Write a book."

I laughed aloud at this. How little did I foresee!

"Very well, then; make some scientific investigations; anything to justify your gifts."

"The point is," I said, "is it wise for Rose and Ronnie to be thrown together as they will be on this trip?"

"Wise?"

"Yes, is it wise?"

"I don't know what you mean by wise. Do you mean, will it increase their inclination to fall in love?"

"Well—yes, I suppose I do."

"Would that be so unwise?" she asked.

"I don't know that it would," I said. "But I'd rather it didn't happen yet."

"Well," she said. "If it's going to happen, it's going to happen, no matter what you do. And if it isn't, your taking them to Switzerland won't make any difference. Both of them are rapidly reaching an age when no one can protect them. Nature will be in charge; not parents or Dr. Grevilles. Switzerland, wherever you go, will

be full of young people, and they'll both make friends, and very likely they'll lose their hearts too. It's out of your hands. Supposing you don't go, it will be just the same."

I acquiesced.

All went well for a few days. And then Ronnie, against my counsel, and also against Rose's, which usually prevailed, joined a party on a bobsleigh, and was carried into the hotel, an hour later, with a fractured leg and a vast variety of bruises. I let the Fergussons know, assuring them that there was no danger, and together Rose and I, with the assistance of a nurse, got him through. He was fairly patient, but his disappointment was acute, and now and then under his weakness he broke down. More than once I went into the room to find Rose soothing him as though he were a baby. All his dependence came out, to be met by all her tenderness. I had not thought she possessed such hidden stores of it.

I must confess to feeling miserably out in the cold most of the time, for Ronnie, though he was as gay as possible with me, and brave enough under the pain that his dressings inflicted, was happy only with Rose, and I could not fail to see it. And he exacted far too much attention from her. I hardly had any of her company. She could not do this or that because Ronnie might want her; Ronnie would be lonely; she had promised Ronnie to read to him; she had sworn that when he woke up, no matter at what time, he should find her beside him. I admired her sense of duty—and resented it too!

After a fortnight the Fergussons joined us, to supervise their son's recovery, and Rose and I went home, for she had her school and I my practice; but I was conscious that not all of her was with me in the train; and Ronnie's parting from her, I realized, had been too emotional. Suddenly he had kissed her as though his heart was breaking, and she had almost to be torn away.

I have seen so many sick men under the influence of gratitude to their nurses that I did not lay very much stress on this incident; but I could not forget it. I wished, however, that Rose

should, and during the journey back I did all that I could to distract her. She was very quiet at first, but gradually became more like herself, and by the time we reached home and she began to prepare for school she seemed usually, at any rate when with me, natural again and free from care. But away from me? And when she was day-dreaming? It was at these times that I realized again and bitterly how finite is our understanding of each other. We live alone! I would have given anything to be able to penetrate her thoughts, and help. But I could not.

Was she in love or merely reflective? Was she looking back or forward? I longed to know, but could not ask.

Mrs. O'Gorman cheered me up. "It's likely it's nothing at all," she said. "Just a passing storm, even if that. Very few of the romances of seventeen persist. I was like that myself: my heart was broken a dozen times before I was Rose's age, and at eighteen I seriously meditated suicide because my violin teacher was married. It was in Dublin. I remember to this hour the smell of the Liffey that came up to me as I leaned over O'Connell Bridge one evening com-

ing back from a lesson, and pretended I wanted to drown myself and all my grief. No one could have entered such water as that! And ten days later I had forgotten all about the fiddler and was inventing a novel with me the heroine and the hero an actor at the theatre that week, who didn't even know of my existence. Maybe Rose will be like that. Don't worry."

Rose had only two more terms, and as she spent most of the Easter holidays with a school-fellow, she did not meet Ronnie. During the few days she was with me she seemed to be heart-whole; certainly there was no suggestion of blighted affection, for her spirits were of the highest. So Mrs. O'Gorman, I assumed, was right again.

It was just before Rose's return from school for ever, in the summer, that I had an unexpected visit from Mrs. Stratton, in the character of the solicitous aunt. She arrived in the forenoon, and while doing justice to lunch unfolded her

purpose. Briefly it was to renew the attack begun eleven years earlier, only now with perhaps more reasonableness.

My unpardonable offence was still the same—celibacy, but it had assumed an increased gravity. To be a bachelor of thirty-four in charge of a child of seven was deplorable enough; but to be a bachelor of forty-five in charge of a girl of eighteen was heinous. It was thus that her nasty mind worked. And not only hers but, she assured me, countless other persons'. In fact, I gathered from her remarks that the unsuitability of my household was the only theme with which, in a few days' time, the world would be occupied.

"This morbid interest in my affairs is very disgusting," I said.

Mrs. Stratton admitted it; but how could I deny that some handle was being given? "You two alone here."

"Well, I do deny it, absolutely," I said. "Don't you all know the conditions of the will? Don't you know that Rose is in my care until she is twenty—that is to say, for two more years—entrusted to me by her father, to act as a father

in his place? It is monstrous to suggest that I am not worthy of that confidence."

"But I am not suggesting that," Mrs. Stratton replied indignantly.

"Of course you are," I said. "The mere fact that you come here and put these ideas into my head is tantamount to a charge, an indictment."

"I don't mean that," she protested.

"It doesn't matter whether you mean it or not: the effect is the same. By bringing your indecent suspicions here you are hoping to make it impossible for me any more to be natural with this girl."

"No, no!"

"Yes, yes," I replied. "Excuse me if I speak with plainness, but I feel strongly about it. It is abominable. Don't you believe that decent living and pure affection are possible in this world?"

"I am sure they are, but I am troubled about my niece's—my brother's only child's—good name."

I thanked her sarcastically for the compliment. I was conscious that I was being rude, but I could

not control myself. There are some persons who always draw out our inferior qualities, just as the companionship of others can increase the value of our character by fifty per cent. Mrs. Stratton invariably evoked my worst side. Any fine edge that I possessed was blunted when we were together.

"It is what people may think and say that is so disturbing to me," she explained. "You know how they talk."

"I am learning," I said. "But any one over thirty-five should have acquired an indifference to public opinion."

"That is a counsel of perfection," she replied. "In ordinary life we are all governed by it, or at any rate we are largely influenced. It would be heart-breaking to me if I thought that people were saying horrid things about Rose and you. Mind, I don't say that they are talking already," she conceded. "But they'll begin very soon."

"How soon?" I asked.

"I can't say with any definiteness. How could I?"

"Well," I said, "I want to know. It is your

business to tell me. Rose comes back on Wednesday. Will they begin on Thursday?"

"But you're being absurd."

"Not at all," I said. "I want to know. I must arrange things. Will they begin on Friday? Remember—a girl of eighteen!—eighteen is just the age for these people to gloat over: eighteen and forty-five, what a titbit for you all!"

"Please don't mix me up in this," said Mrs. Stratton indignantly.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "What a titbit for every one else! But, anyhow, remember that this girl of eighteen will have been alone in her guardian's house two whole days by Friday, with nothing but the maids and whatever good character he may have built up for himself to protect her. May I safely take no steps till Friday?"

Mrs. Stratton was becoming very cross. "You're being ridiculous," she snapped.

"Not at all," I said. "Logical merely. Very well then," I went on. "If we may have two days, why not three? And if three days and there is no public clamour, and the windows are not broken by the Association for Getting Morality into Others or the Society for Suspecting Every

One Else, perhaps we could have a week of innocent companionship, Rose and I? I have not unnaturally been looking forward to it. And if one week, why not two? Surely you must see that I am entitled to know this?"

"I can't think why you never married," was her reply. "Don't you see how much wiser that would have been? Everything would have been simplified."

"Rose and I have got on very well alone," I said.

"But how much nicer for Rose to have had a woman's guidance?"

"Why?" I retorted. "On all questions touching life, worldly education and so forth, a man can be as instructive; and in so far as protectiveness goes he can be as tender and as thorough. What remains girls get by instinct. And Rose likes me: that's another great asset. Supposing that she did not like my wife?"

"But that's being too fantastic."

"Very well, then. Supposing that my wife didn't like Rose? Women can be very disapproving of each other—very jealous."

"All this doesn't affect the main thing," said Mrs. Stratton. "I am still worried by the extreme impropriety of you and my niece living here alone."

"Then tell me," I said, "what you propose—for you must have some proposition in your mind."

"Rose could come to us," said Mrs. Stratton. "We are planning to go to the Italian Riviera for the winter—to Nervi."

"But on returning," I said, "there would be the same opportunities for calumny."

"Might it not be possible to have a companion for her?" Mrs. Stratton asked. "Some nice woman to live here? I know of one I could recommend."

"No," I said, not without emphasis, "it might not. I will not have any nice woman here. Besides, if I did, what would be the result? Simply more suspicions! I should be thought bigamous instead of merely monogamous."

"Oh no!" said Mrs. Stratton. "I meant an elderly woman."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed.

Mrs. Stratton's visit was disturbing. I had been looking forward to two years of Rose's company before the time arrived when she was twenty and would probably want to be independent, and I thought I was entitled to it. These two years were to be very precious—a kind of reward, if you like, for my foster-parental solicitude; and now they were threatened.

It was not public opinion that I was fearing, but the self-conscious restrictions that were being forced on me to the ruin of easy natural familiarity. I should always now be wondering if this or that excursion were wise, or what constructions the beastly world would be putting on this or that occurrence. Nothing could be simple and unself-conscious any more!

I took the problem to Mrs. O'Gorman.

"But you don't mean to say that this comes as a surprise to you?" she asked, when I had finished the story.

"Yes, it did," I said.

"O the poor innocent!" she exclaimed. "And for a doctor too! And haven't I been telling you about it, for years, here in this very room where we're sitting?"

"Well," I said, "I hadn't thought. I was thinking of Rose as a schoolgirl still, not a woman."

"All girls are women," said Mrs. O'Gorman. "That's the difference between girls and boys. Boys go on being boys long after they're men; girls can be women from birth. Let's be practical now. What are the alternatives, do you say—Rose to visit about, or a duenna to be imported?"

"There seems to be no other," I said.

Mrs. O'Gorman laughed her triumphant, knowing Irish laugh. "There is at least one more," she said. "Supposing Rose should become engaged—then no one would have anything to say. Many girls are married and mothers when they're no older than she is now."

She paused.

"You're frowning, Doctor," said Mrs. O'Gorman. "You don't like it."

"It's not what I was wanting," I said.

"I've made you jealous," she went on maliciously.

"How can I be jealous when I'm not in love with her?" I asked.

"Listen to the man!" she mocked. "As if jealousy had any logic, any rules or reason! Every one's jealous—not only lovers. It's one of the impulses of life; it's a part of all kinds of honourable respectable emotions that every one praises, such as ambition. Possessiveness always leads to it—and that is why you'd hate Rose's lover so, because he'd be taking her away from you: first her thoughts, and then herself. So should I be jealous if you spent more time talking with that nincompoop, Mrs. Galloway, than with me. Jealousy runs through life. It's elemental. Listen to your spaniel growling when you're patting my Peek. It's no use being ashamed of jealousy, and it's no use believing people when they say they are superior to the feeling."

"All right," I said. "Let us leave it at that: if Rose became engaged I should be jealous. Horribly jealous. I admit it. Disappointed, frustrated, too. I've hardly seen her yet and some fellow carries her off just when she's of age to be a companion. It's too absurd."

"But that's life," said Mrs. O'Gorman. "No sense in it whatever. Just a stupid hurrying along to the tomb. No time to do anything, ex-

cept to say, at intervals, ‘Good Heavens! what have I been doing with my time?’ ”

“No, no!” I said. “It’s better than that.”

“Very little,” she replied. “But anyway, let you and me be practical at the moment. There are three possible courses: One—that Rose may become engaged and then Mrs. Stratton and all her friends would cease to think of you as an immoral man. Two—that you should invite some elderly spinster or widow to live in your house as a perpetual chaperon. And three——” she paused again.

“Well, what is three?”

“Three,” she resumed: “that you should go on as you are and tell them all to go to the devil. All my votes are for number three.”

“Mine too,” I said.

“But of course the first may happen—don’t forget that,” she warned me.

“I’ll wait till it does,” I said. “Thank you for your sympathy and counsel.”

“‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,’ ” she called after me, with a rather sinister chuckle.

The warning brought back all my misgivings, and as I walked home I knew perfectly well that

the happiest years were behind me and that, to a large extent, my Rose was no more. I had lost her. Even if Mrs. Stratton proved to be wrong and the world did not talk, I had lost her. For the reason that we should be living an unnatural life. A lonely girl of eighteen has too little in common with a man of forty-five whose attitude to her is parental. It is not such as he that she would choose for a companion. Being normal, she would choose a younger man, nearer her both in age and aspirations: some one to commit, if necessary, follies with; not an old buffer.

This point of division comes in every family, but it can be less poignant with real parents. At any rate, a real father would have no such temptation as could assail me, and might have assailed me had I not always thought so naturally of myself as Theodore's deputy, his chosen nominee to bring his daughter up and cherish her; to make her (his phrase was always coming back to me) "beat the band." Would Rose beat the band? Had I been worthy? Can any child be depended upon to react to tuition? Impossible to count on it: the guardian at most can do his best and hope for the best.

Hitherto I had not much to reproach myself with; but I now saw that the real testing-time was on us. The real breaking-point too, for every day Rose, as she ripened and matured and became more conscious of adult things, would be growing towards her own life, her own mate, and consequently away from my life and me. Once again I realized how like ashes in the mouth the fruits of parenthood can be. The new generation is always receding from the old; the old pathetically trying to catch up and understand. The metaphor of a stream rushing between the two occurred to me: almost none able to swim and so few bridges!

Once again I realized how pitiless life is, in its unresting urgency: moving ever on and on, no matter from what contentment, from what joy: the next moment always more important than this one!

Rose came back a woman grown. Not short, not tall—the right height—and to my eyes so

sweet, so desirable, that I could not understand how any young man could fail to succumb, and I dreaded the time when Ronnie and she would meet.

But I need not have done so, for when that moment arrived it was not fraught with passion; indeed, they seemed a little constrained, Ronnie in particular, and it was not until two or three days had passed that the shyness wore off. Whatever Ronnie may have felt, he did not seek Rose's society unduly.

I had proof that, so far as Rose was concerned, there was nothing serious, a little while after, when, regardless of Mrs. Stratton's nastiness, we had settled down to a very delightful routine *à deux*. During one of our talks Rose was frank about her plan of life.

"Of course, Dombeen," she said, "I don't want to leave you before I must, but I want to marry some day; I think every girl who is healthy ought to, and have children."

She stopped and looked into an unfathomable distance.

"Boys," she said. "I don't want girls. I should love to have a boy in the Navy, and see

him in his bright buttons, with sun-burned hair, and freckles. But it would have to be the right man, of course."

"What kind of a man would that be?" I asked, a little wistfully, I fear.

"Don't be unhappy," Rose said, with one of her gay smiles and a touch on my arm. "It won't be yet, anyway. We'll have lots more good times together before then."

"You never can tell," I said. "He may be just round the corner at this moment. In any case I should like to know what kind of man you are thinking of. I might"—here I made an effort to laugh lightly—"I might be able to find him for you."

"It's difficult," she said.

"How old?" I asked. "Do you want him to be your own age?"

"Pretty nearly," she said. "I want to have fun as well. Older men are rather nice, I know, but they're rather grave too. I should hate to be tied to a stodge. Some one who could go long walks, and climb a tree if necessary, and ride, and be silly at parties. But not really silly under-

neath, of course; and yet," she added, "older men are very attractive, aren't they?"

"I hope so," I said: "now and then."

"Oh, you vain thing!" she replied. "No," she went on, "he should be older than I am, anyway."

"A fellow like young Fortescue?" I hazarded.

"Oh no. He thinks too much about his clothes."

"But he's very good looking."

"Yes, in a way. And I should want him to be handsome. I want my boys to be handsome, you see. But not like Harry Fortescue: he's too pretty."

"Very well then. Young Somers-Flint?"

"No, he's too noisy. He has that terrible laugh. I should want him to be amusing, of course, and see all the funny things in life, but more quietly. Besides, I can't stand men with thin noses. His nose is absurd."

"If you want big noses," I said, "what about Harold Swain?"

"Oh, but that's just the other extreme," she said. "The man's a—what do you call those birds at the Zoo, all colours with little eyes set like

jewels and enormous beaks? I know—toucans. The man's a toucan."

"But he's over six feet and a first-class cricketer," I said.

"Yes, I like that," she said. "I should like him to be good at games. But he mustn't be grotesque."

"Surely you can mention some one who comes at any rate nearer your ideal? What about"—I did my best to make my voice sound natural—"what about Ronnie?"

I did not look at her, so I cannot say whether Rose blushed or not.

"Ronnie," she said meditatively. "Yes, I like Ronnie. Ronnie is a dear. But——"

"Yes?"

"Ronnie is to play with," she said. "He's not for a husband. I should want my husband to be stronger than that."

"And then," I said, quite normal again, "there are other things besides looks and character. There's employment, for example. Do you want him to be rich and idle or do you want him to be busy? And if busy, what do you want him to do?"

"Yes," said Rose, "I want him to be busy. I want him to be away all the day, so that his return will be an event to both of us. I don't believe in husbands muddling about at home between breakfast and dinner. I'm sure father would have been happier if his studio had been somewhere else and he had had to go away to it and remain away. He got tired of the house—I can see now, although I didn't know then—instead of looking on it as a harbour of refuge after his work was done. That's what made him so restless and forced him to go away so much: that and his love of seeing new and beautiful things.

"It must be dreadful," she mused, "to be an artist and have such a keen eye for lovely effects and know that they can never be really reproduced in paint. I wish we knew more about Turner and what he felt. He came nearer getting it than any one, I suppose; but he must have suffered agonies of disappointment and failure. The worst of it is, he seemed never to let any one know him, so we have no evidence."

"Well, don't go to the opposite extreme," I said, "and marry a sailor, for you'd hardly see him at all."

"Oh no," she said, "I shouldn't do that. I should want him to come back every evening, and stay back."

"Then no doctor need apply," I said.

"No, I'm afraid not," said Rose. "I want all his attention when he has finished with business. That's an essential. And a steady home that I can make like a home, and go on improving. With a big nursery."

"In the country, or London?" I asked.

"In the country," said Rose. "But not too far out. A place where you can hear the train come in, and go a little way across the fields to meet him and take away the fish basket."

"Ah!" I said, "now I know. He's something in the city."

"I don't mind if he is," said Rose, "so long as he comes back every evening, and loves me, and makes enough money for me to have a handsome everywhere when I go to town, and to take the children to the sea in the summer. That's my idea of a husband."

"I hope you may find him," I said, "and having found him, keep him simple and deeply

rooted. And you must make me a promise.
Will you?"

"Of course."

"Let no one but me supply that big nursery
with its rocking-horse."

So we talked; not once but many times. And this Prince Charming in the guise of the business-man with a tall hat, catching the 9.15 up and the 5.46 down, became a joke with us: one of us at any rate, in the English way, which avoids facing facts, making haste to joke for fear of having to cry.

For a while it seemed as though the alarms about the censorious world were false; but I could rid myself very rarely, and then only for a few moments, of my Fool's Paradise convictions. During the moments that were free from this haunting, our new united life went along happily. Rose had taken over the housekeeping by way of experience; we entertained; a school-fellow came on a visit; we walked over to Mrs.

O'Gorman's fairly often; there were parties here and there; and no serpent in the form of a successful lover entered Eden.

I was more than ever struck by Rose's quiet detachment. She had no absorbing interests: most things found her ready to scrutinize them, but nothing captured her. Most young Britons of both sexes have their hobbies and overwork them, but Rose moved serenely through the days, getting everything done and apparently having time to turn aside if occasion called. I admired this gift immensely. My own tendency is to concentrate almost too exclusively. If she had a hobby it was the arranging of flowers, and I think that her skill and taste in this charming and neglected branch of domestic art amounted to genius.

And then, further refusals being no longer possible, Rose accepted an invitation to her Aunt Stratton's, and nothing was ever the same again. O that woman!

I could see that something was wrong directly Rose came back. We were sufficiently on terms of intimacy for wireless to be established between us: at any rate from her to me. She did not exactly exhibit constraint, but there was something, as we say, on her mind. I was conscious of that. She talked freely enough; gathered up the strings of local life in her absence; told me something of the Strattons, the only one of whom that she really cared for being Angelica, the youngest, a girl of about twelve. Her Uncle George she liked, in a negative way; perhaps, more accurately, was sorry for. The others we didn't discuss.

"That's over anyway," she said; "and nothing would get me to go abroad with them. But—" and then she stopped.

I waited for the rest of the sentence, but it never came. Instead, she asked some question about our own neighbourhood and we passed on to other interests.

But I guessed then what she was meaning to say and later discovered that I was right.

"But"—she was thinking—"although the

visit to the Strattons is over I shall have to be away a good deal, if not altogether, because it's not suitable for Dombeen and me to be alone in this house. People are going to talk—and I couldn't allow Dombeen to have to suffer from that." Such were her thoughts—the fruit of Milly Stratton's insinuations. That she herself would suffer did not matter. Eighteen can look after itself, but forty-five must be carefully guarded—that is how she would have argued. Eighteen is too immature, but forty-five, although, of course, an incredibly advanced age, lends itself to scandal, and doctors must have sound reputations.

Then set in a broken period which I look back upon without pleasure. All parents, I suppose, have to go through similar seasons, when misunderstandings or a want of sympathy alienate them from their children, or their children from them. During the time of dependence things can be all right, and again after independence is attained; but when the wings are beginning to sprout, sons and daughters have it in them to be more than difficult. How much of it have I seen! I was no parent myself, and Rose was

not pining for independence; but she was restless and disturbed because of me: she did not want to go away but thought that she ought to, knowing that I could not.

At last I could stand it no longer. "Look here, Rose," I said, "what's the matter? You're not happy. Tell me why."

"It's difficult to explain," she said.

"Then I will," I said. "You are persuaded that it is unsuitable for us to be together here alone. Your dear Aunt Milly suggested the idea, and you can't forget it. You think people will talk."

"Oh! Dombeen," she said, "when did you take to clairvoyance?"

"When your pretty head became transparent," I replied. "Well, what is to be done? If you feel like that you must go away—or—"

"Yes—or what?"

"Well, if you were to become engaged I suppose that everybody would be satisfied and we could go on as we are. Our only saviour is that punctual husband, with the tall hat and the fish-basket. And he's not yet on the horizon."

"No," she said.

I soon began to have proofs of the accuracy of the Stratton prediction. It is extraordinary—especially in a country district where no one in easy circumstances has enough to do—how intensely interesting the affairs of other people, neighbours chiefly, can be, and how difficult it is not to be inquisitive and censorious. I don't suggest that in a city there are no meddlesome on-lookers, with fingers sharpened for pies that do not belong to them; but in a city there are more distractions and there are also certain impediments to familiarity. In the country you are bound, unless there has been a feud, to know your neighbours; but one may live at No. 5 in a London terrace for half a century and never meet the occupants of No. 4 and 6.

Hitherto I had been on terms of pleasant and easy intimacy with most of my patients; and where there was less cordiality it was probably not my fault. A certain interest in my affairs had been shown—there had been questions as to my biggest break recently, as to what I was sending to the Flower Show, the size of marrows, the chance of the Isle of Wight disease among

the hives, and, of course, inquiries after Rose. But no more. No one had ventured to give advice. But now I began to detect admonitory symptoms, fumblings towards counsel as to conduct.

Lady Fergusson, for example, Ronnie's mother, after a long talk about pelargoniums, wondered if it were true that dear Rose was going to the Riviera with the Strattons. So nice for her to be with young people. So nice for her to be able to go away. It was much to be hoped that nothing would interfere. How fortunate some girls were! In her youth there had been no such gadding about. And so forth.

Then the rector's wife, Mrs. Cumnor, a good enough woman in her way but overburdened with family cares—not however so overburdened that she had no time or strength left to take on the cares of others as well: mine and Rose's, for instance; she too began to cut in.

Rose, she said one morning, after I had finished with her second daughter's pulse, chest and temperature, was, she knew, never ill. How enviable a state! And so active and clever too. Now that she had finished with school she would,

of course, with such a constitution, go out into the world.

"Might not her vocation be at home?" I asked.

"Of course it would be hard for you to have to lose her," Mrs. Cumnor conceded, "terribly hard; but——" and then she changed the subject.

Her husband, who had clearly been put up by his wife to contribute something to the campaign, was more jovial about it: wondering if any young men would dare to propose to a girl who was always in the company of such a handsome guardian. Was it fair to Rose to have a resident spoil-sport? And so on—with plenty of hearty laughter as an ameliorative.

Mrs. O'Gorman confirmed my fears as to the neighbourhood's determination.

"The whole pack's in full cry after you," she said. "You're too happy for them: they can't bear the sight of it. You're free too—and so many of them are shackled for life and full of nasty envy. It's not the best possible world! And yet," she went on, "it's the only one I want. Perfection would be very boring."

"What shall we do?" I asked. "We are beaten."

"Yes, I'm afraid you're beaten. The pack has won. But it's only anticipating your fate by a few months. All parents have to lose their children, and you've been luckier than most. Rose is certain sure to marry, and marry young too, so you'd have lost her at twenty anyway, if not before. She's on the road to nineteen now and you mustn't grumble."

"And what is there left for me?" I asked.

"You?—why, that doesn't matter, because you don't matter. You're a sterile old stick. Sterility has no vote. You'll just rub along, getting through the days, till the end. You've had your chance and lost it."

"You don't give me much encouragement," I complained.

"Why should I?" she replied. "The truth is the only thing worth having, and, in a civilized life, like ours, where so many risks are removed, facing it is almost the only courageous thing left to do. But you might marry yet?"

"Never," I said.

"Very well then, you must rust and bear it." Cold comfort indeed!

If ever there were two people on this planet who might have been let alone, and wanted to be let alone, and deserved to be let alone, they were Rose and I. But it was not to be.

While with the Strattons, at some "At Home," Rose had met a Mrs. Lovell, who was about to go into business as a florist, and she had offered Rose a post. It was to be a florist's of a new kind, for not only were flowers to be sold but they were to be arranged too. The staff was to include flower-arrangers who on the evenings of dinner-parties would go out to decorate the tables. Premises had been taken, just off the Brompton Road, and already a connection was being formed. If Mrs. Lovell still had room for her, said Rose, she would go. It was not what she had dreamed of, but it was something definite, a start.

"There is so little for an untrained girl to do," she said. "It isn't as if I was brought up to have to earn my own living. I'm going to be fairly well off, aren't I?"

"Fairly," I said, "when you're twenty."

"There you are!" she said. "But at the moment, if I have to go, I should like to try to be

independent. And of course, I have to go," she added: "it was cowardly to say 'if.' I can't teach: I don't know anything. I can't type or do shorthand. I don't want to be a companion to an old lady—unless it were to Mrs. O'Gorman; but she's got Julia. But I like being among flowers, even though they're cut, and I like Mrs. Lovell, and I think that's a Heavensent opening. Almost no one arranges flowers as a profession now. The only one I've heard of is a little Japanese man. So we shall have the field to ourselves. It's fun to be doing something original."

And soon afterwards she went.

Of this part of Rose's life I have little to say. I can tell only what I know at first hand. Whenever I was in London—but that was very seldom—I called at the florist's; and Rose came down for Sundays now and then. She seemed to be happy and uncomplicated. Whether her association with me—whether my general tutelary influence in her earlier years—was being of any use to her I had no means of judging. She might have been equally capable without it. Educationalists never know.

The flower scheme failed to prosper, but Rose did not give up London. Even if there were not the same objection to returning to live with me, she had probably lost the wish to do so. I am sure that she was fond of me, but she had made new friends. London was full of variety and attraction and she had contracted the habit of employment and liked it. I don't know anything about the economics of a florist's business, except that to me the thought of having to pay money for flowers is repellent: flowers, one feels, should be free to all; but Mrs. Lovell had not enough experience and Rose was quite capable of giving a bunch of daffodils away rather than haggle over the price. Moreover, the time was not ripe for the professional arranger. I do not know that it is even yet.

To Mrs. Lovell, however, Rose remained true, and therefore continued with her as an ally in her next scheme, which was an old curiosity shop. Not an old curiosity shop where oddity was the prevailing note, but an old curiosity shop where everything had some beauty, either of shape or colour, or was picturesquely obsolete. Such shops, I have observed on my London expedi-

tions, are now very numerous, but Mrs. Lovell's was one of the first. They are usually directed by women. Just as a man may sell wine or be secretary to a golf club and lose no caste, so may what we call ladies keep these shops. Blue and green and purple glass; old stuff for patchwork quilts; spinning wheels; Stafford and Leeds jugs; lace; amber necklaces; beads; brass pestles and mortars; painted rolling-pins; early Victorian dolls—the place was full of things of that kind, and Rose, in a charming smock, was standing in the midst of it on the day that I unexpectedly looked in, smilingly engaged in the task—an easy one—of selling a very young and obviously adoring curate a warming-pan: not, as he was explaining, for use, but for decoration. On seeing me she blushed very becomingly and nearly broke the little divine's heart by her too apparent eagerness to turn to the new customer.

Rose begged the afternoon off—and it was the kind of shop that did itself very little harm by shutting up for the whole day now and then—and we met for lunch and then loitered about in Kew Gardens.

"Has that little curate proposed to you yet?" I asked.

"Not yet," said Rose.

"Any one else?"

"One or two," she replied.

"I suppose a great many men come to that shop?" I said.

"Oh yes. They're very jolly too, some of them, until they fall in love; and then they're so dull. Isn't it funny what a difference it makes? And then they propose and I lose them."

And I, I thought to myself, have lost Rose! Is loss the rule of life? It seems to be.

It was on one of Rose's week-end visits just before she was twenty that she took out a photograph and handed it to me. The photograph was an amateur snapshot of a group on a lawn, among whom was Rose.

"Quite good of you," I said.

"No," she said. "It wasn't me that I wanted you to look at, but the man behind me."

It is strange what effect the most ordinary words can sometimes have! Rose's were casual enough, but my heart absolutely stopped for a moment and a mist crossed my brain. God knows I did not want to keep this child from marriage; her engagement would even be a blessing in disguise, for it would bring her back to her home; but her remark none the less was like a knell.

And yet she had told me nothing! Nothing—and to the fearful swift apprehension of a jealous foster-father, everything!

I pulled myself together and examined the man: tall, regular-featured, with a high forehead due more to thinning hair than to formation of skull. Eyeglasses. His general expression suggested a somewhat condescending benignity, with assurance. I didn't like him.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"His name is Eustace Holt," Rose said. "He wants me to marry him."

"Yes?" I heard my voice say.

"I rather think I shall."

I had no more words. I drew her to me and kissed her hair. The action, I suppose, implied a kind of possessive protectiveness. I had won-

dered vaguely how I should behave when the news broke: and this was the way!

After a long silence Rose went on to say that he was a barrister; had been a private tutor for a while after leaving Oxford, but was now at the Bar and beginning to do well in chamber practice. Not an advocate.

I looked at the photograph again. Probably I should have been cool about any young man who had captured Rose's heart, knowing so well that none could be worthy; but to this one I felt positive hostility. He had the effect of filling me with a sudden warm rush of affection for Ronnie.

"Well?" Rose said.

She knew me sufficiently to discern a want of sympathy; but I hope that I succeeded in concealing the greater part of my antagonism. You see, I was still a liar. Not all my intimacy with Rose and admiration for her candour had cured me. Perhaps had I said, "My dear, I hate the sight of the man: he looks priggish: do promise me to do nothing about it for six months," it might have changed her life. At any rate it could have done no harm, and it would have had

the additional merit of expressing a truth. But I couldn't. For one thing, I had not the courage to be destructive about her own choice, when the romance was still so young; for another, I had not the right. She had seen the man and loved the man, or thought she did; and all the ground for my sudden prejudice was a tiny snapshot.

"Well?" said Rose.

"He's not what I was expecting for you or hoping for you," I replied. "At any rate, not in appearance. He's—well, he's too—too urban. Too prim. In spite of what I said about the fish-basket I have always thought of your husband as more careless, easy-going, gayer than this. I had thought of him as having something of Nature—more of the open air or the sea—but this man's from the Squares. He travels in the Tube. He carries an umbrella."

"My dear Dombeen," said Rose, "how can you know things like that? I'm sure I don't, and I've seen quite a lot of him. He may be a Londoner, but that's nothing. Barristers must live in London. I wish I hadn't shown you that foolish picture. He's really very distinguished

looking, he has a most delightful voice, he does everything well. He's a plus man at golf."

"I can believe it," I said. "But that isn't the point. The point is not, is he a remarkable man, but is he fitted to be Rose's husband? I've known you for as many years as you have been on this earth, and I've watched you grow up in body and mind, and perhaps I've been able to help you in both—and when we help people we learn about them—and I've thought often of the best kind of man to carry you away from me when the time came, but never was it a polished Londoner marked out for professional eminence. Where—just to mention one trifling matter—where are his jokes?"

"Jokes aren't everything. But anyway he can be quite amusing."

"Jokes go a long way," I said; "and you especially would be very dull without them. As for his golf, that's nothing. Golf isn't really a game, nor does it really carry any open-air love with it. How old is he?"

"He's thirty-four," said Rose.

"Thirty-four, thinning at the top, once a tutor,

now a barrister, and going to marry this uncalculating child! O my dear!" I said.

It was of course absurd of me to be shocked by Rose's choice of a husband. I suppose that there never was a girl yet whose selection did not cause surprise. The strange thing to male observers of these matches is the want of fastidiousness that even the nicest women can display. Rose had not erred in that respect, but it is notorious among men that most women do.

I took my disappointment to Mrs. O'Gorman, but she had no sympathy for me. All that she did was to laugh.

"I told you so," she said.

"How can you be so elementary as to make use of that paltry phrase?" I replied.

She laughed again.

"Didn't I tell you so?" she asked. "Years ago. And often since."

"I suppose you did," I conceded.

"Very well then, let a poor lonely old woman full of uric acid, with an extremely incompetent medical adviser, enjoy her little triumph! If poor human nature couldn't say 'I told you so' now and then, we'd hardly have the courage to keep on at all at all."

"Very well then," I said. "You are one of the most remarkable of far-sighted women. Deborah the prophetess was a blind mute compared with you; Mother Shipton was an Aunt Sally. I give you all the praise and glory. But meanwhile, what is to be done? I'm sure that Rose is making a mistake."

"Most people who marry do," said this monstrous old woman.

"Then can't it be stopped?" I asked.

"I don't see how. Surely you've heard the remark—I'm not very original this afternoon. I'm afraid—'Marriage is a lottery'?"

"Well?"

"Well, then there's nothing for you to do. It may be all right. You say that he's respect-

able, a barrister, not poor, not deformed. How then can you stop it? You've got nothing to go on, no valid excuse. If he were a dwarf you might do something; or a tenor with long hair. But I don't see how you could stop her even then, because in marriage the promising matches often go wrong and the apparently ill-assorted have a very good time. Besides, she's only a few months from being her own mistress. You can grumble but you can't prevent."

And that's all the comfort that I got from Mrs. O'Gorman.

But there was one drop of sweetness in this bitter draught. Rose's engagement meant that she returned to me; she gave up her work almost at once.

Nothing, however, was as it had been. (Nothing, says the cynic, ever is.) Our old frank intimacy was over. We had our talks and our walks and our fun still; but there was a skeleton at

the feast, and he was a rising barrister. Rose didn't mention him much, nor did I. But she wrote long letters, and received long letters, and I had no doubt that Eustace Holt received those that she wrote and signed those that she received. And then one evening she suggested that he should be asked down.

"You'll have to see him sooner or later," she added.

"Then it's still on?" I inquired.

"Of course," said Rose. "I should have told you if it hadn't been. When you meet him you'll like him. Or you would if you hadn't made up your mind not to, and haven't got the pluck to eat humble pie."

I never liked him, but it would have been difficult to say why. He was tall, comely, well-mannered, deferential, thoughtful about details, protective of Rose (perhaps that was his real offence), uniformly quiet and easy. What he lacked most conspicuously was an exaggerated characteristic. He conversed fluently and with some knowledge upon all the cultured topics—he knew about pictures and music, as a fre-

quenter of the National Gallery and the Crystal Palace concerts; he belonged to the London Library; he played golf at the Old Deer Park; he had good nails. He dressed well. His suit case was of the solidest leather.

In fact he was all that he should have been and—alas!—nothing that he should not. He reminded me of a well-bound book in a gentleman's library—the kind of book that no gentleman's library should be without, but which makes no appeal to be read.

I am not one of those who fling up their hands in despair and wonder what on earth a sensible girl like So-and-So can see in that fellow she's going to marry. But even when one admits that the deeps that call to deeps in engaged people are and should be invisible to the rest of the world, it is permissible to parents and guardians to deplore the reciprocity. The deeps are not all: in fact the attraction of the deeps can be the least permanent and admirable element in marriage.

I knew enough of Rose's spirit, her vividness, her dependence upon impulse, her love of life,

to realize that she was doomed to spend far too much time alone. Eustace had all the virtues, but he had no imagination. He was also fixed where Rose was fluid. He had his eye on the goal success; whereas all that Rose asked from life was a gay serenity. She was in the habit of watching faces light up at her approach: "People," you might have written on her tombstone as sufficient epitaph, "were pleased to see her"; and all of that was doomed to pass, not because she would be less liked but because she would not be free: she was to be reincarnated as the property of another, as Mrs. Eustace Holt.

Still, there is more than one kind of happiness; there is even, I have observed, a happiness to be derived from misery: all doctors would testify to this; and Rose might find, in her home duties and the practice of wifeliness, a complacency that would take the place of the old radiating freedom. I use the word "might" with emphasis: it is all that is possible to parents and guardians who are threatened with the loss of their treasure and have gloomy prevision.

In my case I was truly hoping against hope, because I had had a shock. On one of Eustace's visits I made a discovery about him which filled me with the darkest forebodings. I had found him one afternoon just before post time seated in the library steaming a stamp off a postcard Rose, it appears, had had occasion to write a rapid order to some shop and, having no half-penny stamp (for those were the days before the blessings of peace had sent up the post card rate to a penny), she had characteristically stuck on a twopenny-halfpenny one from a store which I kept for foreign correspondence; and Eustace had been entrusted with the card for the post. But his careful eye had detected the extravagance, and when I came upon him he was removing the twopenny-halfpenny stamp and substituting a halfpenny one from his own pocket. Knowing Rose as I did, I would rather have found him burgling my safe or even kissing one of the maids; for the action argued a passion for thrift which would lead in time to the sternest censure of the unthinking carelessness in money matters and the constant generosity which were among her most striking characteristics.

The worst of it was that he did not pale or start when I caught him: he merely expressed his satisfaction at having been able to correct Rose's folly in time. He then dried the foreign stamp, handed it gravely to me for future use ("It will need a little gum," he said) and hastened to the post. If ever a home-wrecker was saturated with innocence it was he.

I was in hopes that Rose's formal visit to Eustace's people might have the effect of implanting some misgivings in her. Such expeditions have had that effect in the past, when the impact of the "people" has been so startling as to cause a complete revision of the affections. But not so in Rose's case, and she came back still an engaged woman. (By the way, I did not approve of the ring which Eustace had given her: it was not the superlatively beautiful thing that she ought to have had. Rose should have had some great noble stone in an invisible setting—a ruby or an emerald—but Eustace had chosen

and sent her a muddle of little pearls and diamonds.)

Eustace's father was a clergyman in Berkshire: a rather querulous man, Rose said, but hospitable and kindly to her. Mrs. Holt was more difficult. "But then," Rose added, "mothers always must be critical of their future daughters-in-law. No girl can be good enough for their darling sons!"

Eustace being the only son, the mother was, of course, additionally hard to please.

"How did you leave her?" I asked.

"Resigned rather than rapturous," said Rose. "I did nothing very terrible, but I fancy that she suspects you as a trainer of youth."

"Not so much as I suspect her," I said, "as a judge of brides."

The whole thing infuriated me.

Another cause of vexation at this time was Mrs. O'Gorman.

We are annoyed when our old friends like our new friends too much; but we are even more annoyed when our old friends refuse to share our antipathies to new acquaintances. Mrs. O'Gorman disappointed me deeply by not find-

ing Eustace as unsuitable as I did. Perhaps she was only being wilfully provocative, but the effect on me was the same.

"A very intelligent old lady," Eustace called her, to me. Perhaps a little too outspoken, a little lacking in taste. But very refreshing. A character, in fact. No one enjoyed studying a character more than he. And there were so few of them!

I have just said that few things are more annoying than an old friend's approval of a new acquaintance that we dislike. But I think that to hear an old friend patronizingly appraised by an incompetent critic is almost worse. Mrs. O'Gorman was a character: there was no doubt about that; but Eustace had only a glimmering of that fact.

My peace of mind was further impaired by Rose's tendency to play with the joke that I also must marry. It was not a new idea; but hitherto she had been very light with me.

"What we must do, Dombeen," she had said to me one day not long after her decision to go to London to Mrs. Lovell, "is to get you settled."

"What on earth do you mean?" I had asked.

"A wife," she said, laughing. "You mustn't be left all alone."

"I like being alone," I said: "that is, when you're not here."

"But you ought to marry," Rose said. "Every one says so."

"Who says so?"

"Well, Mrs. Cumnor says so."

"I don't pay any attention to the wives of the clergy," I replied.

"Aunt Milly says so."

"Oh, Aunt Milly! Of course. She has never wished me anything but ill."

"I should feel much happier in London if I thought you were not alone," Rose said.

"That's absurd," I replied. "You were not unhappy at school, and I was alone then."

But now Rose went on to select actual wives! I used to wonder what she really thought about it all, but never discovered. It was not like her to be so persistent with a theme. She usually touched and passed on. Could it be that we were out of harmony in graver matters, and she jested to keep free of them?

She would come back to lunch, after being in

the village, with new and fantastic plans for my marriage. Every spinster and widow within a five-mile radius was weighed as a possible Mrs. Greville. Rose dismissed Mrs. O'Gorman as too old, but her faithful Julia came under the lens.

"But no," she was kind enough to say, "I couldn't let you marry her. A woman must have *some* spirit."

Three unmarried sisters—the Misses Sturgis—had recently taken the Allinsons' old house—after one or two fleeting and unattractive tenants. Rose saw a good deal of them just now and I was on more or less familiar terms both as a doctor and a neighbour.

The sisters, who were refined and affluent, had been brought up as Quakers, but they quaked no more, nor did they harbour any resentment against our "steeple-house"; they had become indeed useful members of the congregation, receiving from the rector the preferential treatment reserved for this particular sect even when they retain their nonconformity.

Rose was never tired of analysing each—Miss Sturgis, Miss Hester and Miss Honor—as a possible wife for me.

"I was looking at Hester Sturgis again this morning," she said. "Really she's very nice. She has very pretty hair, don't you think? She is writing an essay on Walter Pater for the next meeting of the Lowcester Literary Society. She particularly hoped that you wouldn't be there, Dombeen. She says you're so critical, she'd be terrified."

I gave Rose the assurance that I should not be there.

"I wonder if wives ought to be afraid of their husbands," the minx went on. "I mean, of their intellects?"

I made no sign of comprehension.

"Honor Sturgis is extraordinarily nice too, isn't she?" Rose continued. "Don't you like the way she talks? She has the kind of voice that reminds you of that speech in *King Lear*. Don't you love gentle voices, Dombeen? She is tall, too. I believe she's only an inch shorter than you. It's absurd when husbands are immense and their wives little, isn't it?"

You see what an imp she could be!

"Honor is writing a description of a visit to Chamounix," Rose went on. "I don't know

what the Lowcester Literary Society would do if the Sturgises hadn't come to liven it up."

"We got on very well before they arrived," I replied.

"Miss Sturgis was in the garden," Rose continued. "She's wonderful with flowers, they say. If she just put a walking-stick into the ground it would grow. I expect that you and she together would have the most stunning garden in the world. And she's not really old, not more than thirty-eight. Don't you think that married people should be nearly of an age? Some day, when I have enough courage, I shall ask Honor—she's the easiest, I think—why they've never married. With all their money, too! But Quaker girls often don't, I believe. It's funny, because I should think they'd make wonderful wives, so placid and sensible, don't you know. What do you think, Dombeen?"

"I'm sick of the whole subject," I replied.

Eustace was exhibited not only to me—and, I am aware that, to ordinary prospective bride-

grooms, these probationary visits (probationary, but too late for remedy) must be a very trying ordeal and we ought not to be too hard—but to the Strattons. What Rose's cousins thought of him I have no means of knowing, but I suppose that girls are as critical of other girls' fiancés as we can be of the young women whom our friends so mistakenly believe to be Minervas or Venuses. But Mrs. Stratton, even if she may have had a touch of envious regret that Eustace had not first seen her daughters and fallen to one of them, was pleased with her new nephew. Or so I gathered from a letter to me in which she congratulated me upon Rose's alliance with so promising a counsel and so worthy and seemly a man, and went on to refer with satisfaction to the cessation of unfortunate rumours which the engagement would bring about.

Eustace, I found, liked her, and had remonstrated with Rose, but with infinite patience, about her antipathy to the lady. It was her first disappointment in him.

Mrs. Stratton had expressed herself as eager that Rose should be married from her house, and Rose was willing. I was glad that she was, for

many reasons: I did not, for instance, want the wedding in our church, or the reception in our house, with Eustace's people all about; I did not want to see Rose's husband driving away with her into a new life, alien to me, from my door, her door. I could not bear the idea of continuing to entertain the crowd after their departure, when any decent man would wish to be alone. These were selfish enough reasons, but also natural. I deny that they lay me open to any very severe censure.

At the same time I should have liked it had Rose said that only from her true home would she be married. But she did not. Not improbably she had that desire, but was anxious to spare my feelings. She knew that Eustace could never be congenial to me, and least of all as her captor.

I went to the wedding, of course; and I have never been more miserable. It was enough that my Rose was standing there at the chancel steps; but there was more. This was my first wedding

for many years, and I was startled by the service. The gravity and solemnity of the promises exacted from each—such promises as not even angels are asked to make and keep, for there is notoriously no marriage or giving in marriage among them—filled me with gloom and foreboding and a sense of injustice. It seemed wrong to ask any human beings—and particularly boys and girls—to commit themselves in this way. I wondered if barristers when being married have thoughts of the Divorce Court in their minds—that overworked department of the profession where the morbid and inquisitive assemble day after day to gloat over the fragments that remain when all these sacred bonds and assurances have been broken. “With all my worldly goods I thee endow” I heard Eustace repeat after the clergyman. But did he? Does any husband? What would be a husband’s attitude if the next morning his wife said that she wanted his property—all the worldly goods with which he had publicly endowed her—at once? The commonest cause of married unhappiness that I know of is the refusal of husbands to give their wives

even a requisite fraction of their worldly goods for current household expenses. But the words will go on being repeated at the chancel steps for many a year yet.

“In sickness and in health”—doctors know something about the value of that undertaking, too, and how it is honoured.

And so Rose Allinson became Rose Holt, and those of us who were nearest the young couple in kin or intimacy followed them into the vestry to wish them joy and sign the register. Having kissed my darling and written my name, I slipped away. I could not endure more. The vestry had a back door and I slipped through it, pocketed my button-hole carnation, and, after lunch, went to a sale of mezzotints at Christie’s, where I endeavoured to soothe my feelings by buying two Valentine Greens which (unless I was to die next week, when one can afford anything) I couldn’t afford. And so far as I could see then, there was no particular reason why I should not die next week—nothing, I mean, important enough to call for my continued existence.

Mrs. Eustace Holt was, I think, fairly happy in her early married life. I saw her now and then and was not conscious of anything very wrong. She seemed to have lost tone: that was all; but I put that down largely to living in London, cooped up by bricks and mortar instead of her old free garden life. Also Eustace was not exciting. But I think she was fond of him, and I know that he was very proud of her, perhaps even to tiring her by exhibiting her too much to his friends. She was too candid to be a very easy dinner-out and too courteous not to make the effort.

And then came the tragedy. Rose's first child died at the end of only three weeks of life. You remember what she said about wanting boys. Well, this was a boy, and Rose was in the seventh heaven of delight. She squandered herself on it. No other young mother, the nurse told me on that sad day when we buried the poor little creature, had, in her experience, been so happy. "And that, as you know," she added to me, "is a big thing to say."

I found my poor child inconsolable; in a kind of stupor of bewilderment and revolt against

the blind stupidities of fate. To let this perfect little being fade into nothingness and allow the ugly, blundering world to go on!

She was long in recovering and longer still before she was herself again. I did all I could to get Eustace to let her come to me to convalesce, but he would not let her out of his sight, and took her to this and that health resort, and even for one winter to the Riviera.

It was nearly two years before I saw her again, and then I went up to dine and spend the night by way of celebrating my fiftieth birthday. That was in 1900.

Every doctor is asked for advice in matrimonial differences, or at any rate is made a confidant. One can have too many of such confidences; but I defy any general practitioner,

however brusque and curmudgeonly, to escape them altogether. Most of us have seen so many couples that we can tell at a glance what is wrong—which brand of incompatibility is in use. For there are so many. Temper is supposed to have a monopoly in this matter, but that is far from the case. There can be incompatibility in other matters, apparently trifling, and trifling in fact unless lifelong fetters are involved. Incompatibility of temperature, for example, where the lute is rifted because the wife wants all the fresh air that windows and doors can let in and the husband rejoices only in a vacuum. A doctor sees so many of such antipodal house-mates—I don't say that all are married people—that he comes to divide the world into those who are healthily disposed and those whose only idea of a window is a thing to shut.

It is a truism that wedded felicity is a very fragile craft, liable to be swamped by any unforeseen wave, and it requires the most delicate seamanship, both at the helm and at the sail. I have seen marriages ruined by so pleasant a spice to ordinary intercourse as irony. Irony in a husband, and a tendency in a wife to depreciate

her husband or make him a butt in public—these have much misery to answer for. Absence of mind in a husband can be fatal: an inability to look ahead, to reserve seats, to order a cab, to remember theatre tickets. And then, again, over-much presence of mind can be fatal too: an insistence on punctuality and too much officiousness about the house.

I could not tell which was the cause of the want of sympathy between Rose and Eustace, but I felt something was wrong almost directly I entered their door. Outwardly they were pleasant enough together; but there was no warmth in the air, no electricity. Rose Holt was not Rose Allinson—very far from it. But she was sweeter than ever to me; almost I could bring myself to be glad that all was not well, for it made her so tender, so thoughtfully attentive, to her old friend. It was the Rose of the middle teens over again, but with a richness and maturity added. Eustace was courteous, a solicitous host, and I felt spoilt between them. But there was something wrong. When their eyes met across the table no light kindled.

It was a comfortable, distinguished house.

The furniture was good. The right books were scattered about, some in French; the right periodicals. Photographs after the Old Masters. In Rose's little boudoir were water colours.

After dinner Eustace left us. He had some difficult papers to go through and master, and we were left alone.

Rose established me by the fire and sat beside me on a cushion.

"Is all well with my child?" I asked.

She did not reply.

For a long while we were silent. I could not ask her to tell me more; and she would not volunteer because only half the secret was hers.

"When are you coming to stay with me?" I asked at last.

"Oh, Dombeen, I should love to," she said. "But it's impossible. Eustace doesn't like me to be away, ever. He counts so on my presence here."

"But he could come too," I said.

"Oh, no," she replied. "No. He doesn't like the house to be left. No, it can't be done."

I had no right to press the case. But I could

not refrain from saying—"Then you are never to visit me at all?"

"Of course: some day," she said. "But not yet. It couldn't be for a long while. You see . . ."

And then I learned that she was again to become a mother.

How the world rushes on! A child grows to be a girl, and a girl a wife, before one can turn round. And then there is another child and the same restless urgency sets in once more. I thought of some lines I had read years and years ago that had stuck in my mind:

"There is so much we ne'er can know—
 No time, no time!
We seem to only come—to go."

I went back feeling all out of tune and dissatisfied. This may be a common experience with parents after their first visit to their married daughters; but I had not even thought of it before. True, I had set out with some vague misgivings, but so often—it is almost the rule—the realization is better than our fears for it, that I had discounted the premonition. And now I

knew that my girl had made a mistake. It was not so much that she was unhappy as that she had lost her old habit of happiness. She had become passive where she had been vividly active. Instead of joy she had found resignation. I don't mean that she was broken-spirited in any way: but she was too quiet. If I were God I should be very much ashamed of having added resignation to young wives' armouries.

Rose's second baby was a girl. Eustace sent me a telegram to that effect and I wondered much on her feelings toward it. There had been no joy in her voice when she had told me of its coming.

I went up to see them when Rose the second—for the child was named after her mother—was two weeks old, and was led into the room by Eustace.

Much could be written on the different demeanour of husbands on such occasions, for some behave like impresarios and some like trespassers, some are boisterous and some are perplexed, but none, however much they want to disguise it, are totally without pride. Even those husbands who are as much embarrassed

and hampered by their wives presenting them with a son or a daughter as they would be if their valets were to lose an arm, cannot wholly conceal their triumph. Eustace, although with cool reserve, belonged to the impresario class.

How often does one hear well-meaning people say, when discussing the marriages of others (and of course discussion is superfluous and insipid when marriages are satisfactory), "Ah, if only they had had a child, what a difference it would have made!" But in my experience children can divide parents quite as much as they can unite them. I may have entertained some hope that the little pink creature with the dark silky hair in Rose's arms was to bring Rose and Eustace closer; but there was no indication of it. Again when their eyes met no light was kindled. How that other child, that boy of her desire, would have affected the love of husband and wife it was not now possible to say; but this little helpless mite in its mother's arms obviously was without any federating gift.

Eustace said a few nice things to Rose, and something about new-born infants being no novelties to me, and left us.

"I suppose she's perfect!" I said.

"Poor little pet, she's so warm and dependent," said her mother.

"A nice doctor?" I asked.

"Quite," she said, "and the kindest nurse possible."

"Then you're happy," I said, but I knew that she wasn't.

The unwanted children—are they not tragic figures? And their name is legion. Every doctor can give you a list!

I don't say that this minute Rose was exactly unwanted. Rose—my Rose—was incapable of coldness to anything young and soft and helpless, least of all a baby; and Eustace, I could see, liked being a father. But the Rose who had given birth to that little boy, and Rose the mother of this little girl, were worlds asunder. This Rose was affectionate, thoughtful, dutiful, protective; that other had been transfigured by maternal ecstasy and pride.

Eustace and I lunched alone, and I did my best to penetrate his armour, but in vain. How did he think of his wife? What kind of need of her had he? Was he disappointed or was all

going as he had expected and wished? Why on earth had she found him attractive and how had he lost his hold on her? A hint of the possible reason of his own attitude was offered when, to my question, Didn't he find himself a little at sea domestically when Rose was upstairs like this? he replied No. It seemed that the direction of the household was his hobby. He arranged the meals in advance, scrutinised and paid the books, interviewed the servants. He had done this as a bachelor and liked to know how his money was being spent.

"With all my worldly goods I thee endow"—the words came back to me as he talked.

So Rose was not even mistress of her house, had no realm to queen it in. "What women want is a home" is an old-fashioned saying in which I am a believer; and Rose was without one. All that she had was a footing in Mr. Holt's.

How I longed for some of Mrs. O'Gorman's trenchancy and candour to tell him of his mistake! But I had none. I could observe and deduce, but I had not the courage, or arrogance, to censure.

I went back to my great empty house with a grudge against the universe. The grudge passed, for I do not dwell on injustice, but the emptiness remained. And so the next few years went on, and I grew older and probably more mannered and narrow. I also took an assistant, who was in time to be a successor. Meanwhile Eustace prospered and Rose brought up her little girl in Wilton Place, and I saw them only on rare occasions. One of the strangest things in life is the ease with which people who are fond of each other do not meet. Our tendency is to run in grooves and find it difficult to leave them. Or to change the metaphor, no matter how big the world is, most of us are at heart villagers.

Rose's letters were regular and, up to a point, informative; and I wrote with equal regularity. But the written word, no less than the spoken, often merely conceals the truth; and I got very little inner information as to the Holt ménage. My deduction was that routine had completely taken the place of romance (if ever there had been any worth the name. Rose never complained, but also she never rejoiced. Her truth-telling impulses were checked by the fact that

only half the story belonged to her. To tell more was to tell Eustace's share too; and that was not playing the game.

One afternoon, when Rose the second was five, a message arrived from the Hall to ask me to come at once to see Master Ronnie.

"Master Ronnie! What is he doing here?" I asked in surprise. When last I had heard of him he was a soldier in a responsible post in India. I think it was at Poona; his mother had read me from time to time little bits in his letters. How old would he be now? Let me see, he was a year older than Rose, and Rose was twenty-eight. Twenty-nine. So far as I could recollect, he had never married. His mother had regretted this, but was always counting on some nice girl attracting him during his next leave. She did not want him to be caught by any of those Anglo-Indians!

And now here he was, and ill. Ronnie and illness were contradictions in terms, and I asked

the messenger what was wrong. An accident, I presumed. But it was worse than that. He had had bad fever and could not get it out of his bones. Ordered home for a long rest and treatment. Was very thin and white and didn't seem to relish anything.

When had he arrived?

Three days ago, but he wouldn't let them send for me before; he hated to be coddled.

I found him in a very poor state. Some malarial poison in his system and his spirits low. Poor boy, he was only the shadow of his old self. But, in a way, more attractive still, for his illness had given delicacy to his candid, merry face, and his charm of manner was unimpaired; while one's pity for his condition increased one's affection for him. When the admired strong become suddenly the dependent weak there can be a strengthening of their adherents.

It was while Ronnie was slowly mending, but still only the shadow of his normal self, that Rose and her little daughter came to stay with me. Rose had proposed the visit and I was only too glad to have them. Eustace, she said, was in Paris, on some commission of inquiry.

I had seen Rose-the-less occasionally, but only in London and on her best behaviour. Playing on my lawn she was more natural, and I delighted in her straight little body, her quick movements and her eager ways. She was like her mother, but unlike too—she had a hint of selfishness, which her mother lacked; she was less essentially womanly; and she had an imperious touch. She knew what she wanted and her enjoyment came largely through getting it, whereas her mother as a child had found things delectable as they came and had not chosen and demanded. But there was nothing unattractive in the child's selective impulses: they did not suggest any kind of rapacity. For the rest, she was very like that earlier Rose. She made friends as quickly, she asked as many questions and she was happy all the time.

"Why does mother call you Dombeen?" was one of the first things she wanted to know.

I explained her difficulties with the word Greville.

"May I call you Dombeen too?" she asked.

I said that I should like nothing better.

Rose—my own Rose—I found older and

graver. She could laugh still, and as her visit was prolonged she laughed oftener and gradually gave up the new habit of thinking visibly before she spoke. Her impulses being always gay or cordial or merrily mischievous, she need never have become cautious. But I could see that she had. It is melancholy indeed when a natural self-unconsciousness is destroyed: and that is what had happened. And how often I have seen it happen elsewhere! One of the prevailing superstitions of English husbands is that wives are better for being de-individualized.

One thing that a little perplexed me was Rose's attitude to her daughter, which appeared to me curiously detached. I wondered sometimes if there were not some defective sympathy between them, as between Rose and the child's father. Rose was kind and gentle and a delightful companion to the little girl; but no fierce maternal flame was discernible. I could have wished for a glimpse of such a fire: but there was none. It seemed to me a trifle hard on the mite that she should be at all out in the cold on account of other people's affairs; but on the other hand she never seemed unhappy, or less happy

than might be; and Rose had no intention of unfairness. Besides, human nature can't be logical.

As Ronnie got better he came oftener and oftener to us, to lie in a deck-chair in the garden. Rose used to sit by him there and sometimes read to him, or he told little Rose about India, very much as the old Colonel had talked to her mother, but with additional modern piquancies. Now and then Rose and Ronnie returned to their battleground in the billiard-room; but he was not strong enough for a long game. Sir Edmund and Lady Fergusson would now and then walk over to accompany him back or push his wheeled chair.

Remembering the episode at St. Moritz, I was a little uneasy to see Ronnie and Rose so much together. But I did not feel strongly enough about it to interfere, even if interference had ever been my long suit. Besides, I was so glad to see Rose happy again. Moreover, Rose was grown up and a mother; Ronnie was grown up and ill. Not that being grown up adds anything to power of resistance when emotional temptations offer.

Perhaps to say that I was uneasy is too strong. Rather was I not unconscious that that popular plaything, fire, was adjacent, and yet not conscious enough to be really apprehensive. It was always possible that Ronnie's state of dependence and fragility was the only cause of Rose's solicitude; while it was natural enough for a convalescing soldier, such as he was, to sun himself in the company of an old playmate.

I forget how long Rose and Rose stayed with me on that occasion. But after Ronnie had been taken off to some seaside resort they returned to London and I was more alone than ever. That must have been the early summer of 1906.

The next period of importance in this rambling narrative is October of the same year, and I can place the day exactly, because on my way toward home I was stopped by some one running out of the "Crown Inn" to say that old Pritchard, the host, had had some kind of a stroke. I found him pretty bad, the result of

some extra conviviality on a life of excessive and chronic alcoholism, the occasion for which—and this is how I remember the date so distinctly—was his good fortune over the Cambridgeshire, which that year was won by Polymelus.

Having done what I could to patch him up, I returned home. While I had been in the "Crown" a tempest of cold rain had set in, bringing with it a dreary consciousness of the end of fine weather. One had the feeling that the year could never recover: winter was our fate, and winter to a country doctor means too much to do and a great deal of discomfort, with too few of the roadside compensations which he gathers as he drives about in the summer and the spring.

My thoughts went naturally to Rose, whose susceptibility to weather had always been so acute; in whose world, could she plan it, rain would fall only at night. I was still thinking of her as I left the car at the garage door and walked into the house.

On the hall table was an envelope addressed to me in Rose's writing, but it had not passed through the post. I took it up with misgivings which all too soon were to be justified.

"Dearest Dombeen" (it ran), "I have gone away with Ronnie. He needs me more than any one else does, or at least I believe so. Eustace will understand why I have gone when he begins to think." So far it was written clearly and directly. But then came some broken sentences. "As for Rose," she had begun, and then had stopped. "Rose is my only" she had begun again and again had stopped. "Will you" was another false start and was also scored through. The letter finished merely like this. "Dearest Dombeen, think your kindliest of me. Good-bye. Rose."

How long I held the paper in my hand I cannot say; but I then rang to know how it had got there at all.

Suzanne answered the summons.

I asked her what she knew.

She was crying softly as she told me. Mademoiselle Rose—Madame Holt, she should say—had rushed in "toute émotionnée." She could not wait for me. She had come in a car. She had written the note and was gone again.

Did Suzanne know what the note was about?
Ah, yes. *Quel dommage!* But *la vie* cannot

be kept within fixed bounds. Pots boil over. All this in her hard Norman speech. She was fatalistic, but still she wiped her eyes.

Monsieur would not think less of Madame Holt because of this, would he?

I assured her that I was not a judge.

“La pauvre petite!” Suzanne exclaimed, with a sob.

She had been so assiduous in spoiling Rose's daughter when they were with me that I naturally thought these words referred to the younger of them. But I was wrong. It was of the older Rose that she was still thinking, for she went on more brightly: “Mais, c'est bon. Maintenant elle sera heureuse.”

“Will she?” I asked.

Mais oui. Suzanne was certain of it. Madame Holt would not have taken so great a step if she were not to be happier for it.

I was astounded at her confidence.

My first impulse was to hasten after the fugitives and try to bring them to reason. But reflection showed me that this was impracticable. I had no notion where they had gone or even

when; probably not by train, but all the way in the motor, and there has never been such an ally of runaways as petrol. In the old days there was some chance, even though faint, of tracking and overtaking a pair of horses; but motor-cars vanish into thin air, leaving rainbow splashes in the roadway to mock the pursuer in every hue.

Then I wondered if Sir Edmund and Lady Fergusson knew. For Rose to tell me at once was natural; but would not Ronnie wish to let a little time elapse before breaking the news? I guessed so. At any rate, it was not for me to be the bearer of such ill tidings. If it was for any one to storm the citadel, that person was the wronged Eustace.

Eustace? Yes. And what of him? He had been told as well as I, I supposed. Rose had never done anything underhand or secretive in her life, and she would have made it a point of honour to let her husband know that she had cut the knot. At this moment he was probably sitting, stunned, in his library, or perhaps with his little Rose in her nursery, and most likely harbouring evil thoughts of me.

In my dismay and distress I put off dinner for an hour or so, and walked out into the rain to Mrs. O'Gorman's. It seemed an occasion for the old Irish lady's pitiless candour. The equally pitiless downpour would, I felt, help too. There are times when one welcomes a storm to fight one's way through.

My thoughts were not idle as I stumbled against the torrents. No aspect of the case did they neglect. I can tell only of what I know, and I have no information as to Ronnie's hold on Rose after his return and what steps preceded her decision to run off with him. But it is not difficult to realize, at any rate, the temptation. Here was the old friend of her happiest days once more—free and I don't doubt more than rejoiced to see her again. He had been in strange countries, and probably had carried her image with him through all his wanderings and loneliness. He had never been articulately in love with her when they were youthful together; he had not proposed after that accident—I am sure she would have told me if he had, because she knew that I liked him. When she used to talk to me about her marriage and all those nice boys who

were to gallop about the nursery, I had thought naturally of Ronnie as their father. One visualizes a figure on such occasions, and Ronnie sprang into being. But, as it happened, I was wrong. Rose had not thought of Ronnie like this: she had merely liked him, automatically so to speak, and when Eustace came along there was no earlier occupant of her heart to eject. Eustace found it all too easy.

But after her marriage so much had happened. And it must never be forgotten that Ronnie compelled interest, all unconsciously maybe, by the force of personality. He was quite ordinary in everything but personality, which in his case was physical more than spiritual. His ready smile, his white teeth, his gaiety, his good humour, his general friendliness and out-for-funnishness won him an easy way into the good graces of the world. He was popular almost universally. Rose, as I have said, had never to my knowledge, or even to my suspicion, been in love with him; nor he with her in any but a superficial degree, even if that; but there was always that intimate experience in Switzerland in the background; and each had since had too much

time to think about the past and to speculate upon the might-have-been: Rose in the watches of the night taking stock of her marriage and its disenchantments, and Ronnie in a foreign land sick of a fever.

Both were older too—not so much older in years, but older through what had happened: the passage of time being often almost negligible in influence compared with certain experiences. A woman grows mature so swiftly: a three weeks' honeymoon can do it, a night can do it; the birth of her first child always does it. It may be only in compartments, but maturity is there somewhere. And Rose's child was five years of age. As for Ronnie, I suspect that such adventures among women as had fallen to him—and a handsome young officer in India has many admirers—had chiefly thrown his thoughts back, in comparison, to Rose. When he might have won her he had not; after, when he wished he had, she was another's. I don't say that he had brooded on this, but he probably recurred to it when least happy; and regret, like love, never stands still: it increases or it diminishes.

And her disenchantment, her starvation!

Eustace's frigid decorum, his supervision of the housekeeping books, his morbid interest in her minutest personal expenditure, his tendency to relapse into the tutor and shape her mind wholly by his, so that instead of the home containing a rising barrister and an impulsive, warm-hearted, generous woman it should contain merely a rising barrister and his female derivative—all this had surprised her and depressed her. Marriage, she had known—being a normal creature, full of the instinct of her sex, and not only the instinct but her sex's capacity to endure—was necessarily a matter of adjustments. Any two persons agreeing to live together have to learn each other's ways and make allowances: even two men and two women. How much more so then when the two persons suddenly thus beginning a new and intimate co-habitation are a man and a woman, natural enemies—or, at any rate, natural censors of each other, naturally jealous of each other, naturally misunderstanding each other! Perhaps the word enemies may stand.

In the case of her own marriage Rose quickly learned that the adjustments were all to be hers. The only change that Eustace made was to add

a wife to his house; he kept the same habits; he played his golf at the Old Deer Park just as he had always done; he read the books from the London Library; he took her, regardless of her taste in music, to concerts. But he had never really loved; he had been attracted by Rose's gaiety and vividness, even if he had neglected to cherish those qualities after they had passed into his keeping; he had known that rising barristers are usually furnished with wives, and that they do not rise the less because those wives are beautiful. He had known also that marriage is a natural state; that the duty of a good citizen is to have children; that wives can be more comfortable than housekeepers; and so on. I don't say that he had put any of these thoughts into words: they were merely the outcome of common knowledge. Nor do I want to be unfair to him or to suggest that he was not proud and affectionate. I think that he was. But again I say that he had no imagination: he took things for granted, and directly a husband does that he is doomed.

Eustace's refined and comfortable home in Wilton Place was never disgraced by anything

so unseemly as passion or even eagerness. Returning from his chambers he had never upset furniture in his desire to get to her. When he brought flowers to her and she crushed them to her bosom in an ecstasy of enjoyment, a spasmodic return to nature, he warned her that she was in danger of breaking the stalks. He had brought the flowers though. That is the trouble: he was always nice and handsome and courteous. But there it stopped. Having no imagination, no instinctive knowledge of women, no sexual shorthand, he was unaware that nice men are negligible. What women want is not niceness but devotion, not courtesy but worship.

And then—I was still fumbling towards an explanation of Rose's desperate act—then there was the disappointment about the boys. Rose, as I have said, had set her heart on being a mother and the mother of sons, and there was only one surviving child and that was a girl. I have brought enough children into the world to know something about the part that they play in married life, and I can set it down firmly as a fact that it is all to the bad when the sex of the child is not that which the parents had desired.

The girl who ought to have been a boy has to suffer for it; and so, though in a less degree, does the boy who ought to have been a girl, but he is not a common figure. Has it ever been suggested, I wonder, that some of the traditional alleged untrustworthiness of women is due to the fact that they were not wanted? I don't say that I agree as to this inferiority of the sex, but proverbial lore, which is the wisdom of many and the wit of one, has decided that they are false and fickle, unstable, coy and hard to please, and so forth: and that may be a cause. Certain it is that the nurse who announces that the little pet is a girl is rarely treated as a bringer of good news; whereas if she can say it's the finest boy she ever had in her arms she is, for the moment, an angel. Why should an unwanted child trouble to be constant and true and without caprice? Some revenge it is entitled to.

Rose, however, does not come within the category of the unwanted, for her sex had been determined by her father and mother months before I assisted at her *début*, and her name had long been chosen. Why they should have desired a girl instead of another of the lords of creation,

I cannot say: probably because the father was an artist, and artists are notoriously eccentric. But there it was: they wanted a girl and they had one, whereas that girl, when her own time of fulfilment came, wanted not only a boy but many boys, and could not bring up one. Rose, I am sure, had a feeling of resentment for the girl who had lived where the boy had died. With that tiny boy baby much of her joy in life was buried. He had lived long enough in the actual world for her to make a little god of him; and before that life had been there was the life he had lived under her heart.

To say that she was not fond of Rose would be to tell an absolute falsehood—she took a grave pleasure in her, although treating her perhaps more as a toy than a daughter, as a wonderful doll whose capacities she never tired of studying—but she was steeped in a deeper rapture when her breast nurtured a son. That is all.

To put it in another way, I don't believe that when Ronnie arrived and opened the door upon whatever fair prospect he displayed to her or she imagined she saw—whatever avenue of escape—Rose would have stepped through had the

child she was to leave behind her been a little boy of five instead of a little girl.

Who knows what women feel? We may guess, but they will never tell us. They won't even tell each other. As regards Rose and Ronnie, my guess is that his pathetic collapse attracted more than his radiant vigour would have done. Had she found him triumphant, as of old, she would have remained unscathed. Strong and masterful he might have called to her in vain, for she was never a sensualist. It was his dependence that swayed her and decided her. It was the boy Ronnie needing tenderness and care.

Involved and fantastic as it may sound, I have the belief that it was the mother instinct that took Rose off with Ronnie more than love. What I mean is that she did not go with him as most women go with men, through ordinary passion, but because he was fragile and in need of protection and she thought of him as her own, or—subconsciously of course—even as one of those unborn sons which he himself would have begotten. So mystical can women be!

But of course the wild hope of escape was

present too: the wish to live a little more fully while there was yet time; the feeling that to endure another moment with Eustace was impossible and wrong.

And again Theodore's wish came back to me. Was this "beating the band"? Could anything be farther from the ordinary conception of that successful and honourable act than running off with another man and leaving husband and child? And yet, it had required courage, devotion, disregard of the world's censure—all the things that properly-brought-up and even universally respected people need not possess. What a muddle is our civilization!

"You must forgive this untimely and unprofessional visit," I said, as I was shown into Mrs. O'Gorman's over-furnished sitting-room.

"Don't be foolish, Doctor," she replied. "Have done with your politeness. Don't I know why you're here?"

"You do?" I exclaimed.

"Of course I do," she said. "It's about Rose. She's bolted."

"But surely the villagers aren't talking?" I said in a panic of alarm. "You don't mean to say it's not a secret!"

"No one knows but you and me," said the old lady.

"And Suzanne," I corrected.

"O, Suzanne! She doesn't matter. She's an ally. But no one else knows. I know because I had a letter to-day. Rose took me some way into her confidence when she was staying with you. Old people often get told things. But don't worry; it's all right."

"All right?" I echoed. "What do you mean? Do you want young wives to behave like this?"

"When they're like Rose—yes," she said. "The poor lamb was miserable. That iceberg of hers was no good except to freeze her. She wants life, love, human emotions, and she'll get them with the young Captain."

"But——" I exclaimed, aghast at this Bolshevism. "You talk as if people had the right to do as they please—break laws—anything."

"Not all of them by any means, the idiots," she replied. "But Rose—yes. Rose ought to have all she wants. I advised her to. It's—no, don't interrupt me—it's your own doing very largely. You brought her up to be happy and true to herself. She saw you always at work ministering to other people—Oh! I know you were paid for it—I've paid you myself—money thrown away too, for I only get worse—but that doesn't matter: you're a soft old thing at heart. Anyway, there was Rose, the apple of your eye, with a natural sweet disposition, and the centre of your circle of friends, and the mistress of your easy-going prosperous house, and she gets into kindly humane habits. Then she marries this refrigerator K.C., or whatever he is, and begins to miss everything that she had been used to. He's a stupid fellow—he hasn't even the sense to be ill and touch her heart that way—he can't lose his temper—can't swear—only be politely rasping now and then—and he gradually wore her down, diluted her sweetness, crushed her nice impulses, made her live according to Cocker."

Wonderful, I thought, what a lot the old lady

had divined, for I'm sure Rose never told her in words.

"There was no doubt about his selfishness," I said.

"As for selfishness," said Mrs. O'Gorman, "I don't mind that. That hasn't necessarily anything to do with it. All the most attractive men are selfish, even if the most selfish men are not the most attractive."

"I wonder if that's true," I said.

"Think about the unselfish men you know and you'll soon realize its truth," she replied. "Unselfish men don't give us any fun at all—I'm talking as a woman, remember—they make it too easy. The selfish ones keep us thinking, and when they forget themselves it's delicious: I mean, it used to be." She sighed and laughed. "But it's about Rose we're talking," she continued. "Having got rid for a while of her husband, she comes down here and finds that poor boy, her old friend, ill and miserable, and all the love she ought to have felt for him years ago suddenly materialized, but a million times stronger, and there you are. 'Bolt, my lamb,' that's what I said to her, although she never

asked for my advice. ‘Bolt, my lamb, and be happy while you can.’”

“Well, I’m——” I began.

“Say it,” she said. “Say you’re damned. Nobody minds. But you’re not so damned as that poor child would have been if she’d gone back to the Arctic Zone. I’m old enough to believe that the whole purpose of unhappy people’s lives is not endurance. I’ve seen too much of it. And so has every one, especially you doctors. Endurance? No. Let revolt and escape have a chance too. That is, if people really want them. The trouble is that really wanting things is so rare. It’s a lukewarm world!”

“Anyway,” I said, “I’m amazed that you could dare to advise anything so revolutionary to Rose. It’s a terrible responsibility.”

“We look at it differently,” she replied. “I’m twenty years older than you, and, being a woman, perhaps I feel more bitterly for Rose. Besides, I’m a rebel and you’re not. I’m a believer in cutting knots, and you—although you’re more sympathetic than most—are still in favour of ‘endurance vile.’ Let those endure that enjoy

it, say I, but let the others try for a second innings and a happier. If Rose had remained it would have been for what purpose? To pander to her husband's respectability. Do you defend that? Is that your idea of a sound motive?"

"Everything can be put up with," I said feebly. "Ever since I began to practise I have been watching couples putting up with bad jobs."

"And admiring them?"

"In a way—yes," I said.

"And wanting the same kind of death-in-life for your own girl?"

"Well——" I began.

"You must answer that question, yes or no," she insisted.

"No," I said.

"And then," I began again, "there's the child. What about her? Left motherless."

"Well, and what about Rose herself?" Mrs. O'Gorman retorted. "She was motherless and

fatherless too, and she grew into happiness and became a beautiful woman, thanks in some degree to some one who shall be nameless."

"But who," I said, "might possibly be feeling not a little guilty over the way that things are turning out."

"But who, if he did so," Mrs. O'Gorman added, "would be a very silly old boy."

"Do you hold me absolutely innocent then?" I asked.

"Innocent of harm—yes," she said. "Because there's not the harm you seem to think. There's social shipwreck, of course, but that's nothing, because they'll live abroad. There's the Iceberg's grief, but that doesn't matter because he was never really in love. There's little Rose—but she's only five and will adjust herself. No, the only real sufferers will be the Captain's father and mother, who, like all *nouveaux riches*, were thinking of a grand match for him. They'll be very sore, and not unnaturally. But the world isn't for fathers and mothers: it's for sons and daughters."

"You are a cynical old woman," I said, "and

I'm ashamed of you. I'm almost sorry I've kept you alive so long."

"You didn't," she said. "If I've survived it's been in spite of you."

"But what of Rose herself?" I asked. "How can this be any but harm to her?"

"Because she's happy," she said. "She's happy now—to-day—and she's going to be happier once she's on the sea, sailing away with her boy to make a new home together. She's got something to squander herself on, and that's happiness, even when the something isn't worth it."

"But her child?" I returned to the point.

"Her child will be all right, too. You—or some one else—will bring her up."

"I don't say that it is so in Rose's case," the ruthless old commentator added, "but lots of girls are better away from their mothers than with them, and lots of mothers better away from their girls. Children often enough would be the better if they were brought up by other people and not their parents. I'm sure I should have been. My mother and I were like Kilkenny cats most of the time."

To my intense surprise, who should arrive the next day but Eustace, leading his little girl by the hand. I had expected to hear from him; but I had never thought to have him again under my roof. Vaguely I had guessed that he might associate me in some way with his wife's action; unjustly, of course, but people are oftener unjust than not, and he was wounded to the quick and in no position to be too fair and reasonable. Besides, it was while Rose was visiting me that she had met Ronnie again, and it was the news of his return and illness in one of my letters to her that (I now saw) had determined her to come just at that time on a visit to her early home. I had touched an old chord and set it vibrating. All this Eustace, I thought, knew, and I was taking his resentfulness, however ill-founded, for granted.

But how often we are in error in our notion of what other people are feeling! And how difficult it is to learn not to continue to make such mistakes! Eustace was harbouring no such grudge; he held me innocent; he even went so far as to wonder, when we were alone, if he himself might not somehow have been to blame. He

could lay nothing specific to his charge; and yet. . . . But no, it could not be through fault of his own. Try as he might—and he had passed sleepless nights in reviewing the past—he could not recall ever having failed in any direction whatever in his duty as an affectionate and solicitous husband.

The letter that Rose had left for him, he averred, when it came to essentials, said nothing. He did not show it to me but gave me the sense. It expressed sorrow at her failure to make him a worthy wife, regret at the collapse of their dream, and then said that she was sure that when he thought it all over he would understand, and, understanding, forgive. But if he could not forgive he would forget.

“Forget!” Eustace exclaimed. How could he forget? How could he ever forget? The shame of it too.

But he must not inflict his misery on me. That would be unfair, and I naturally had my own disappointment and grief to dispel.

We were sitting over our tobacco, late—too late for me, for I was very tired and the contemplation of spilt milk has never much attracted

me. Would I tell him, he asked, of my own affairs? What was the health of the neighbourhood? Good? All the same, I must agree that it was extraordinary, incredible even, that his wife, the mother of his child, should find it possible to do this—this—he hated to be hard on her—but he was bound to call it, this scandalous thing? To leave her home in Wilton Place, one of the most charming and convenient houses in London, every one said: to leave her circle of friends, hers and his—was not that all amazing and beyond credence? As for himself, he would say nothing, except that barristers, by the very nature of their calling, are peculiarly in a position to be protected by their wives rather than made by them to look foolish if not despicable. How thankful he was that when he was called to the Bar he had decided to specialize and not take up advocacy. The spectacle of a leading divorce court counsel himself unable to retain his wife's affections would be too ludicrous; his career would be finished. As it was—but his mind was in a whirl on the whole question of his future.

That I felt sorry for him as he laid bare his wounded ego, I need not say. No one could

have failed to pity him. But to see him so blind to any but his own misfortune, so incapable of putting himself for an instant into Rose's place, or to realize that such a woman must have suffered much and long before she could take such a step, was to withhold a certain measure of sympathy.

He would not, he began again, inflict any more of his perplexities on me. It was not that that he had come for. Would I mind if he took the key and went for a walk? He had no desire for bed and I must be weary.

I was rising to comply with this exceedingly welcome suggestion when he began again. What was not the least extraordinary part of the whole mystery, he said, was the circumstance—mark this!—that Rose had never given the faintest indication of unrest, dissatisfaction. How could one account for it? It was not as if he had been cool or careless or in the slightest respect neglectful. He taxed his memory in vain in the attempt to collect a single instance. As to his having given any of the ordinary causes for jealousy—that was laughably out of the question.

He laughed now, to illustrate the impossibility, and his hollow travesty of mirth gave me deeper knowledge of the poor fellow than all his words. If he had only known that such complete failure to provide a wife with cause for jealousy is no surety of married bliss.

None the less, he went on, guiltless as he held himself to be, he could not keep at bay the suspicion, the reflection, that a man is not deserted by his wife without some reason. What it could be passed his comprehension, but he had the gnawing fear that it existed. Could I offer any suggestion? I had known Rose longer than any one else, even though she was an immature girl when she left me.

I said that there must of course be some reason. Was it not possible—women are strange creatures—that Rose needed something more than a good home, a circle of London friends none of whom had she known before marriage, unintermittent courtesy from her husband?

“Women are not like us,” I went on: “women are capricious—it is a commonplace of the dramatists and novelists, who are supposed to know—look at Shakespeare, Browning, Hardy, every

one—they are capricious, incalculable, they have odd whimsies, desires—every doctor can tell you about them—they take sudden dislikes. In short,” I said, “they are women.”

He agreed heartily.

Some women, I continued, even actually appreciate a little bullying, a little roughness; some must be continually re-wooed, taken on new honeymoons. The greatest mistake in marriage can be the limitation of honeymoons to one. As for Rose—he must remember that she was born and bred in the country: her early days had been spent in gardens; perhaps she was spoiling for the open air again. Oh, yes, I knew that Wilton Place was near the Park; but I meant something more open than that. She had a touch of the woods in her: something of the dryad, even the naiad. Surely he had noticed that?

No, he had not. I was thinking of her, doubtless, as a child, and he had known her as a woman and a mother. I must remember that. Nor could he quite agree that I had in the least accounted for anything more than a sudden wish for a holiday in the country. I had said nothing

yet to explain her physical treachery—her infidelity.

“There,” said I, “I have no theory to propound.” Nor had I. I would not have propounded it for the world.

In that case, he said, he must fall back on what was at once the kindest and the most plausible theory—that Rose had lost her reason. Yes, that was it. Her mental balance was disturbed, and in her derangement he had become antipathetic to her, the author even of some imagined inconstancy; and in her nervous, unhinged condition she reverted, perhaps subconsciously, to her youthful days, and, thinking herself again the playmate of this boy, this soldier, she had automatically, as it were, resumed friendship with him, and he had been base enough to take advantage of her distraught state and had carried her off. That, he felt sure, was the explanation; yes, that was it.

He fell into a long silence, but I had no hope. He had now, I could see, given up all idea of his nocturnal walk. Nor could any movement of my own—adjusting the shutters, moving ashtrays, and so forth—deflect his thoughts.

What steps he intended to take, he went on, he could not say. He had not decided. All that he had decided was not to make the case public, and to go away. London had become unbearable; he shrank equally from the spoken condolence of his friends and from their tactful avoidance of the subject. He had long wanted to visit the Argentine, where his services were, as it chanced, in demand at the moment in connexion with some big dispute, and in the future of which he was a firm believer, and he should take this opportunity of throwing some of his care on to the bosom of the sea, the great simplifier.

But in order to do that with a comparatively assured mind Rose must be left in good hands.

This brought him to the purpose of his visit, which he could assure me had not been to force me to listen to his tale of woe at all. Would I, to put it briefly, would I let him leave Rose with me? He should feel absolutely at peace if I would. There was no one else whom he could trust in the same way. He had many relations, it is true, but—well, there it was. And somehow there was a kind of fitness in it. I had brought up his own Rose, who was the most beautiful

creature he should ever meet—here he almost broke down and I admired him for it—and, well, and—here he broke down completely.

I confess to being deeply touched by the confidence implied in his request; and I shivered as I remembered my unfounded suspicion that he was likely to hold me to blame, at any rate in part, for his tragedy. It seemed to me as high a compliment as could be paid, that he, with his poor torn feelings and his pride all in rags, should be willing to place his daughter under the care of the man whose possible laxity had been responsible for her mother's defection.

But the question would have to be considered very thoroughly. The responsibility would be very great, nor was I in some ways as well fitted to become a little girl's foster-father as I had been, twenty years ago, when the other Rose had come to me. I was then young enough to be an active playmate and I was flexible. I had now become not only older but a man of fixed habits, many of which would have to be broken. Could I break them, and did I want to break them? For Rose's child (could she have engineered so complicated a business as having one

without the assistance of any one else) I would do anything, but this was Rose's-and-Eustace's child, and that made so much difference. I could be sorry for Eustace, but never could I like him, and supposing that some of his least admirable characteristics manifested themselves now and then in his offspring, might I not become actively antipathetic? Human nature can be so unreasonable, so unjust, and I pretended to no immunity from illogical aversions.

Nor was I in any need of a constant companion. Since Rose's marriage I had tended more and more to eremitical consolations—to my prints and gardening—whenever my patients permitted me. Nor was the personnel of the place of the kind that it had been when Rose's mother had come “for good.” In those days, as I have told—and very likely told twice—I had old Hannah to help me. But Hannah was now a rheumatically crippled paying-guest at Lowestoft who could do nothing for me even if I again lured her forth. And the march of progress had established a cash chemist near enough to my rounds to lead me to give up dispensing, and so there was no longer Wellicum for the new Rose

to help and hinder and besiege with questions. The same march, in another department of its attack upon the goodness and oldness of the days that are gone, had substituted a motor-car for my horses and traps, and so there was also no groom for Rose to help and hinder and besiege with questions. There was a chauffeur, it is true, but a man who has to do with machinery does not compare, as guide, philosopher and friend of small inquiring persons, with a man who has the care of horses.

A gardener I still had, though Briggs was dead; and neighbours, among them Mrs. O'Gorman, now getting on in years, but with all her faculties; and some kind of a spurious, inferior Hannah could be obtained; and if Rose liked animals she could be provided both with a pony and a boy to look after it. None the less, it was a great problem and I had very serious doubts; yet I knew I should say yes. And I should say it with the more confidence because of Suzanne. Suzanne was my sheet-anchor. It is true that I could not consider her attitude to the elopement very sound: it was indeed far too lenient; but I seemed to be surrounded by old women with

advanced sympathies (perhaps all old women at heart side with love's rebels?), and Suzanne's profound affection for Rose's mother could not but make her careful over the little girl.

But as we get older we become more self-protective; so I gave no promise, but shook hands with Eustace and said that I would think it all over and let him know in the morning what I decided. Upon this promise he permitted me, to my great joy, to go, at a very late hour, to bed. My last waking thought was one of satisfaction that he had not, at any rate, said anything about band-beating.

If we are all to be arraigned at the Judgment Seat and put finally in our places, why not wait till then? Let God dispense favour and disfavour, rewards and punishments, that being His *métier*, and meanwhile let me be unjudicial and kind. That had been for so long my creed that I was staggered when, not long after, Ronnie's father, with whom I had been on amicable, neigh-

boulted terms for years, and with whose interior I was too intimately acquainted, cut me dead in the post office.

The next afternoon her ladyship, Ronnie's mother, failed to acknowledge my salutation, and I knew that my disgrace was complete. Obviously it was I who was to blame for Rose's wickedness.

That evening I received by hand a letter from Sir Edmund stating that after what had happened it was the wish of himself and his wife that I should never darken his door again. I remember the phrase distinctly—never darken his door: he must have carried it in his mind from a melodrama witnessed in his youth. Much as they had esteemed me in the past, the letter continued, and much even as they were indebted to me in my capacity as a doctor, they could never forget that their poor son's affections had been basely stolen—all ill and weakened as he was—by a woman whom I had brought up. They did not say that it was the direct effect of my loose training, but that was the suggestion. Their hearts were broken, their heads were abashed, and they had lost their only child, the prop of their old

age and declining years, and it could never have happened had not Rose been my ward and grown up in my house, in that village, as a neighbour of their own. Under the circumstances I must see that further intercourse between them and me was an impossibility. And the remark applied also to my assistant. The letter ended with a request for my account.

My answer was chiefly an acknowledgment, but I could not refrain from suggesting that while I had been bringing up the girl who had run away with their Ronnie, they had been bringing up the boy who had run away with my Rose. Were we not equally bereaved and distressed and even ashamed, they and I? But nothing but a cheque came in reply to this.

In due time I wrote to Eustace to say that I would take Rose while he was away and do my best to preserve her sweetness. And then I paid a visit to the wing of the house where Hannah had reigned, to see what was needed.

To my surprise, I found Suzanne busy with a polishing-cloth.

I asked her what she was doing there, so far from her own domain.

It amused her, she said, to keep it bright and make it toute prête.

Toute prête for what? I asked.

For la petite, she said.

But why should she do that? I asked, concealing my astonishment. How could so young a child be coming to live here, with all us old folks?

Suzanne resumed her polishing. It was in her heart, she said, that the little Rose was to make her home here. It was what her mother would have wished.

I never saw more pleasure written on the human countenance than lighted up Suzanne's when I told her that she was right.

Mrs. O'Gorman was naturally the first person whom I officially told.

"I'm glad of it," she said. "I was hoping you might."

"Other critics won't be so well satisfied," I said.

"Don't mind them," said Mrs. O'Gorman. "But what an adoptive fellow you are! You're a regular crèche! No children of your own, O dear no!—nothing so vulgar as marrying and begetting—but if any one has a daughter going begging you're the boy to bring it up! It's amazing. How old are you?"

I told her. And I may as well tell every one: when Rose the second came to me for good I was fifty-six.

"Fifty-six!" she said. "The prime of life. Up-hill till you're fifty; then the top of the hill till you're sixty; then the steady decline. It's a foolish world, Doctor; there's no steadiness in it. We're always hurrying to the churchyard: some of us unassisted, others being pushed by our medical men."

I told her that that was too old a joke for her to crack. We looked to her for something original.

"Old jokes are best," she said. "At any rate,

there's something very sound in that old one about the advantage of adopting a child rather than having one of your own. Those, it says, who adopt choose, whereas those who have a child in the ordinary manner must put up with what they get. You're one of the clever ones, Doctor; you choose. And may Rose the second turn out as pretty and as sweet as that other one! Bring her to me quickly. There's no time to waste; when one is nearly eighty one can't postpone."

Little Rose quickly became a comfort, and she was like enough to her mother for me to feel that a benign miracle had been performed and the clock set back twenty years. It is given to few persons to enjoy a second time on earth, and I think of myself as peculiarly fortunate in having twice been the most intimate companion of a child. For my first Rose, I shall always have, I imagine, the tenderer spot; but the second Rose did perhaps more to cheer me, for I was much older when Eustace left her in my charge, and

she helped to keep me young. It is possible that but for her mother I might have made more of a life of my own, and even, it is possible, have been the father of Roses. No one can tell—nor am I suggesting resentment or even disappointment. I am probably better qualified to bring up other people's children than my own, and the world is over- rather than under-populated. But the Devil's advocate, who thought of this possible count against the first Rose, would be hopelessly dumb when called upon to indict the second.

The second Rose was a more active child than her mother had been—not restless, but alert—and there was little that did not interest her. Her mother had made her own entertainment, but this Rose found most of hers in the visible world. Nothing escaped her notice.

In the excitement of her new life she did not miss her mother with any poignancy, and seemed to be satisfied with the explanation of her absence that she had gone across the sea. This was true. Ronnie had left the army and he and Rose were on their way to the Malay States, where he was to grow rubber. As for Eustace, the child never mentioned him at all. He had been one of those

fathers who are seen only at breakfast and on Sundays.

Until a nurse was found—the Wilton Place nurse having refused to live in the country so far from the Knightsbridge barracks—Rose had a bed in my dressing-room.

One of her timidities was concerned with moths. For some odd reason those foolish gentle insects, who have never been known to harm any one but themselves, terrified her, and often and often she would wake me in the night with the cry, “Dombeen, there’s a mawf in the room!” or “Come quick, Dombeen, there’s a little mawf somewhere.”

She grew out of her fears, of course, and in time occupied a more distant apartment; but for a long while I rarely got through the night without some such call—the little monkey even employing it as an appeal when there was no danger, as the boy called “Wolf! Wolf!” in the fable. But no matter how suspicious I may have been, I always went. “Dombeen, Dombeen, there’s a mawf in the room”—how I wish I could hear that now! “Little Mawf” became one of my names for her.

It was with the new Rose as with the old: my patients were intensely interested in her. Not many, however, were the same as those who had been so solicitous about her mother. Some had left the neighbourhood; some preferred my assistant; some were dead. Mrs. O'Gorman was, I think, Rose's favourite, in spite of the years between them—the old lady now nearing the eighties and the child not yet six. Seventy years is a big dividing gulf; and yet when they were together there was little sign of it, such was the adaptability of both.

The first time that I took Rose to tea, Mrs. O'Gorman gave her two presents—a fearsome agate brooch (she had an early Victorian taste in ornaments) and a paint-box that had been her companion on sketching rambles when she was active. It was one of the old-fashioned boxes, with the colours in cakes and a drawer underneath with a porcelain palette in it and many fascinating accessories. The agate might as well have been thrown into the river, but the paint-box was a treasure beyond price, and it played a great part in Rose's destiny, for it turned her

thoughts to art, and some of her grandfather's skill soon began to manifest itself.

Having this resource, Rose needed less entertaining than any child I ever knew. Give her a pencil and a piece of paper and she would be happy until the paper was covered on both sides. It is odd that her mother had no desire to draw and no aptitude: that the talent should skip a generation and manifest itself again in Theodore's grandchild; but so it was. Rose the elder had beguiled her loneliness by telling herself stories; Rose the younger scribbled men and women and little girls and little boys and dogs and huntsmen and princesses and cats on the blank spaces of letters and the insides of envelopes or whatever scraps of paper could be found, from morn till dewy eve.

Ronnie's people took too much delight in illness to be happy in their aloofness from me. Disregarding a certain solidarity in the medical profession, they had assumed that Dr. Vaughan

in the next town would be only too willing to obey their capricious summonses whenever the slightest pain made itself felt in either of their systems. But Vaughan was a friend of mine by no means desirous of supplanting me anywhere or of getting a footing in the Hall. He therefore refused to go. Doctors, it is notorious, must obey calls of distress or bear the consequences, but not when other doctors are nearer, and, as he knew why I was not called and knew also that Sir Edmund and Lady Fergusson knew that he knew why I was not called, he was in a very strong position—strengthened by the alliance of the telephone, which enabled him to make quite sure of his ground. Most telephone wires, could they be induced to repeat all that they have ever transmitted, would have some odd things to tell, and the conversations between Vaughan and myself while this feud was flourishing would not be least amusing. We had the great advantage of having been contemporaries at the same hospital, and it is, at bottom, only contemporaries who really understand each other. Old and young may meet, but contemporaries mingle.

In the face of the confederacy between

Vaughan and myself the unhappy Fergussons, racked with gout, were forced to send for Vaughan's rival, a young bumptious and climbing practitioner who had just set up in the place and was pulling every wire for social advancement, but who, for all his latest learning and diplomas, was wanting in the most important quality that a medical attendant can possess, the power to suggest confidence. There are patients who would languish under the care of the most brilliant physician in the world lacking the gift, and who would recover quickly though only a farrier, possessing it, should stand beside their bed. Sir Edmund and Lady Fergusson were therefore very awkwardly placed.

Their next step was really rather Napoleonic and made Sir Edmund's rise to wealth clear to me. They determined to bring down a new doctor who should be both agreeable to them and capable as a healer and establish him in our very village, not only as a constant attendant upon themselves, but as a menace and source of annoyance, and even loss, to me. But here they were balked by the goodness of my friends. One cannot be a doctor in the same rural neighbourhood

all one's life, and succeed a father who also had been there for years and years, without setting up certain relationships that are thicker than water. I had made no effort to do so, but simply through being one's more or less amiable self, and liking my work rather than not, I had done so. If I had consciously toiled to be popular, I might have failed; but I had just gone on my way, neglected no one, at any rate not scandalously, spoken my mind when it was asked for, and hurried, I hope and believe, very few of my neighbours under the turf. To have built up this structure of friendliness was my part in the frustration of Sir Edmund's masterful campaign. His own contribution to his failure was his neglect to have become the owner of any property in the district except the Hall and its satellite cottages. The result was that when his nominee tried to rent a house in which to set up his rival practice, he could not get one. Anybody else could have had one—an avowed burglar even, with all his tools about him—but not a doctor!

The situation was not made any easier for the Fergussons by the palpitations of their cook—a

very excellent cook—who, on being forbidden to visit me about her malady, at once gave notice. If she might not have the doctor she wished, she explained, she should certainly leave. Nor would she stay out the month either, she added, but would cheerfully forfeit her wages in order that she might the sooner submit her agitated heart to my examination. Good cooks having never grown on blackberry bushes, and this one being especially clever with chicken's livers (one of Sir Edmund's many culinary weaknesses), her departure was a very serious blow to him, in a very sensitive part.

To say that Sir Edmund and Lady Fergusson's aches and twinges multiplied under their disappointments is to state the case with parsimony. They increased to such an extent that the two old coddlers saw graves yawning for them on every hand, and longed with a consuming longing—which was not the less because each had to hide it from the other for pride's sake—for the solicitude and knowledge of the only man who knew them through and through—a longing so constantly consuming that there was nothing for it but to go to London or to fly the flag of

truce. They hated London, but to capitulate was too undignified; and so for a while the Hall was empty.

By what chance the news of Rose's flight reached Mrs. Stratton I have no notion. But in course of time she heard it, and I hardly need say did not deprive me of an opportunity of learning what her feelings were. I cannot give the exact words of her letter, because I tore it up quickly, but its spirit remains with me.

It was largely a fantasia of triumph on the *motif* "I told you so." What could be expected, it asked scornfully, of such a bringing-up as the poor girl had had? When children are handed over to cynical and irreverent bachelors we must look for trouble. What chance had Rose of living a sound life after so much careless familiarity with me and my friends? And so on. It all pointed to the importance of steady self-sacrificing home-training. We might sneer at the old-fashioned ways as much as we liked, but they

were the best, after all. Her own girls, Mrs. Stratton was thankful to say, had been brought up to respect religion and do their duty, but their training had made no difference to their natural brightness and joy. It was not necessary to be superior to conventionality in order to be gay!

Poor Milly Stratton! What a Benjamin's portion of humble-pie was hers not long after, and how careful we should be to discourage tendencies to self-righteousness! If there is a good little cherub that sits up aloft filled with benevolent protectiveness for the simple sailor-man, there is no less surely a mischievous little imp, infinitely more watchful, whose mission in life is to detect the complacently virtuous and make things hot for them. Milly Stratton came very quickly within his sphere of action, poor woman.

Driving up the road just before lunch I saw a strange figure in the garden and was instantaneously conscious that she was unhappy. Why the set of the shoulders, the movement of the arms, of an unknown visitor seen among rose bushes at a considerable distance, should convey an impression of mental disorder, I cannot explain; nor am I a particularly good observer.

All I can say is that in a flash I received the suggestion; and, as it happened, it was right.

On reaching the house I found that the stranger was Mrs. Stratton, who turned a distraught face to me as I approached her.

"Dr. Greville," she said, "I am come both to ask your forgiveness and your advice."

"Forgiveness?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, forgiveness. I was very hard on you many years ago, in that room there, on the night of the reading of poor Theodore's will, and I was very hard on you the other day in a letter which I wrote about Rose."

"That's all right," I assured her, adding that she certainly had had provocation on the first occasion, and no doubt also I was not very nice to her. I was younger then and perhaps too assertive: perhaps rather offensively proud of being selected by Theodore as his daughter's guardian.

"No, you weren't," she said. "No one was horrid but myself. I was proud and self-righteous. But," she added brokenly, "I have been punished."

She began to cry and I led her into the house.

"Tell me after we have had lunch," I said.
"You must be tired and hungry."

She said that she could eat nothing, and was as good as her word.

Throughout the meal she looked miserably, and yet with a kind of fierce wistfulness, at little Rose, who did not know in the least what to make of it—why this stranger should be here at all, why the tears rolled down her cheeks with no accompanying uproar, why she refused such delicious cheese-cakes.

A more uncomfortable meal I never ate, and all the while I was speculating as to what had happened. Could the placid George have revolted at last and left her? But that was impossible. Had he been speculating and come to disaster? More likely.

When we were left alone the story burst forth. It was not George. In a way it was worse, more damaging to her pride: it was her youngest daughter Angelica. Angelica, aged only twenty, and not even engaged, was going to have a baby.

O these babies! All the troubles and complications of the world come from them. If only they could be eliminated the globe would gradually

fall back into a permanent peaceful wilderness. That was perhaps my thought during the silence that followed her announcement. But "Good Heavens!" was all that I could think to say: said, I hope, with a note of sympathy to balance the surprise.

"I came to you," Mrs. Stratton resumed, "because poor George is so helpless, and you are a doctor and, I trust, in spite of my behaviour to you, a friend of the family—almost, in a way, one of the family."

It was no time to repudiate the second suggestion.

"So carefully brought up as she has been!" the mother went on. "But that's all over," she added quickly, probably recalling her letter to me. "The thing now is to see what can be done. You will help, won't you? You must know of some place in Paris where she could go?"

Odd how all doctors are supposed to know this, and odder, perhaps, how naturally even the most insular and irreconcilable of the censors of France turn in these times of despair to that deplorable country!

"Surely you need not exile the girl?" I said.

"The scandal would be bound to leak out at home," she replied. "Besides, there are her sisters to think of. They must not be contaminated."

"They don't know, then?"

"Not yet. Certainly not."

"Where is Angelica now?"

"She is still with us."

"Then," I said, "I should imagine that her sisters do know. And in any case, why contamination? They need not be corrupted by the knowledge. It might make them the more understanding, the more merciful."

"Don't you blame her?" Mrs. Stratton asked, as a kind of challenge.

"I blame her—yes," I said. "I think she has been foolish: she has wronged herself and you; she has flung away treasures of pride. But you must remember that I don't know her; I have no idea of the strength of her temptation; and in any case I cannot consider everything lost. The error is not irreparable. It is according to Nature. At its worst, apart from a criminal want of prudence, it is but an anticipation of a ceremony."

"Then you think we should condone it? Keep her among us?"

"Within touch, most certainly," I said. "Don't exile her. This is when she wants kindness more than at any time in her life—this is when you have your first real opportunity to be her mother. You ought to jump at it instead of suddenly freezing into a judge."

"But the disgrace?"

"Well, you must exercise a little discretion, of course, and do all you can to preserve her good name. Many a family has been confronted with the same problem and carried it off with success." I had it in my mind to add that if no cupboard held a worse skeleton than an unlegalized baby there would not be much wrong with the world; but I refrained. I refrained also from reminding her of the line in "Lear," "The gods stand up for bastards." Mrs. Stratton could not have understood, nor was she in the mood for any levity. Indeed, I was perplexing her sufficiently, all unready as she was for such novel ideas as I had been unfolding.

"What does Stratton say?" I was moved to ask, to break her silence.

"George?—Oh, he doesn't know about it. I wanted to see you first."

"You must tell him," I said. "You'll find that he will agree with me."

"Won't you come back with me?" she asked. "It would all be so much easier if you would. Angelica might tell you things that she won't tell me. I don't mean the man's name—no one could get that from her. I am sure you could help. It would be such a load off my mind if you would come."

And I had of course to comply.

I could not leave instantly, and while I was making the preparations I was amused to see, out of the window, Mrs. Stratton stealthily approaching the kitchen door. She knew that Suzanne ruled there, and her mind had by no means relinquished France as an ally!

I discovered afterwards that my guess had been right. But Suzanne had as little practical sympathy as Mrs. Stratton had colloquial French, and the interview was a complete failure. There are delicacies of situation beyond Ollendorff's range.

If Mrs. Stratton assured me once on the jour-

ney, she assured me thirty times, that she would never be able to hold up her head again.

“Nonsense!” I replied; and I was right. She is holding it fairly high still, but with far less self-righteous aloofness. Angelica’s illicit bantling, whose existence we were able to conceal from the world, did more to humanize its grandmother than anything else could have done. As for Angelica, she is now married and a respected matron, with sons and daughters born in as lawful a form of wedlock as Church and State can provide.

But that has nothing to do with my story, and I apologize for the digression. My reconciliation with the Fergussons also is not precisely in the direct line of this narrative, but having described the earlier stages of the coolness, I must be permitted to record the later.

Coming back along the Lowcester road one afternoon, I found a big car at such an angle across it that it could not be passed; and on approaching closer I discovered it to be the Fergussons’, with Lady Fergusson inside. So they had returned! I had become accustomed to looking fixedly in front of me when we had chanced to

meet before they took refuge in town; but the present situation would have rendered such a manœuvre impossible, even if, directly I pulled up, the Fergussons' chauffeur had not come to ask if I would do her Ladyship the kindness of speaking to her for a moment.

I went to the door and she extended her hand.

"Do come in for a few moments," she said. "I want very much to speak to you." Here she groaned.

"But——" I began. There was something very offensive, after being cast off as I had been, in the assumption that I should be ready to be taken on again whenever the relenting mood occurred to them. Nor had I shaken her hand.

She burst forthwith into tears and I entered the car. I could not (as she knew) allow her to make an exhibition of herself at the window, with the chauffeur looking on.

"Dr. Greville," she said, "I am a very miserable woman. Don't be hard on me. I have been punished enough." She groaned again, among the sobs.

"Tell me as quickly as possible," I said. "I want to get on. My rounds are not finished yet."

"I knew you would come back this way," she said, "and I intercepted you. It is so little that I am able to do alone. That letter, now—it was not my letter, I did not wish it, it was Sir Edmund's. Sir Edmund was implacable, but I—I knew that blame cannot be cast like that, just on one, and Ronnie was so fascinating, how could a girl help falling in love with him? But Sir Edmund could not see it. All he could see was Rose as a temptress and the ruin of his son and his name. You know how I have to give way to him? Believe me, I have regretted it ever since, and nothing but very wicked pride—we were always so proud, we Ancasters—has kept me from trying to see you sooner. But now my pride is humbled. Poor Sir Edmund—I don't know what he would say if he knew I was talking to you like this—poor Sir Edmund is ill, and you must forgive us for his sake. Say you will. No doctor but you inspires any confidence. We have tried so many."

"I forgave you long ago," I said.

"Then you will come to the Hall again? Quickly? Will you? Sir Edmund is ill. I don't know what it is, but something grave, something

new and mysterious. Never mind about me”—she groaned again—“but he, poor darling! he must be looked after, he must be healed. You will do this for my sake? You will come to us again?”

“I must think about it,” I said. “It is not quite as simple as you seem to suppose. I have been very oddly treated in a very public manner.”

“I know you’ll come,” she cried, as I returned to my car. “You have such a good heart and I am so penitent.”

That evening I was sitting over my cigar after dinner—Rose having gone to bed—when the servant announced a gentleman to see me.

“What name?” I asked, for I was enjoying some well-earned repose, and indiscriminate callers had to be guarded against; but before she could reply a muffled-up figure was in the room. Removing his scarf, cap and goggles, he revealed himself as Sir Edmund Fergusson.

“You must excuse this visit,” he began nervously, “after what has happened, but it has been on my mind for a long while to explain.”

“Won’t you sit down?” I said.

“You are very kind,” he replied, taking a seat,

while a spasm of pain crossed his heavy features. "The fact is—but that has nothing to do with it. What I want to do is to explain. This unhappy business of Ronnie has broken us up, but I want you to know—" He broke off and again a twinge took him.

"Would you mind if I were to light my pipe?" he asked.

I offered him cigars.

"You are too kind," he said, taking one. "More than I deserve, really. But"—he lit it—"you, well, the best way I can put it is perhaps to say you are not a married man."

I agreed.

"And not being married, you, well—in point of fact, you can't know. A man, especially as he gets on in years, has to make concessions to his wife. All life is compromise, as you know, and married life in particular. A certain happiness; or, at any rate, peace, must be secure, and compromise is the highroad to it—in fact, the only road. But it is absurd for me to be saying all this, because, of course, you know Lady Ferguson."

I knew her well, but I knew also that in that

ménage the grey mare was not the better animal; it was Sir Edmund who ruled, and any compromise that was made came from his wife's side.

He may suddenly have been aware that some such thoughts were passing in my mind, for he added, not without a slight flush, "Of course, you have not seen her lately"—as though during the few months of our estrangement both her character and his own had undergone one of those changes that happen only in tracts and fairy tales. He even had the hardihood to add, "You'll notice a great difference when," but stumbled over it and went on quickly—"that is, if you ever honour us by your company again, as I most cordially hope you will.

"For," he continued more fluently, "it is about that that I have come; about that, and our letter to you, which I have been regretting ever since it was sent. What I want to make clear—without any disloyalty, mind, to Lady Fergusson—is that that letter was written when we were in a highly nervous state and was written almost wholly at her Ladyship's wish. You recall what I said about compromise?

"Well, my dear doctor," he said, "my dear

Greville, if you will permit me to call you that once more—for the sake of harmony, for the sake of that peace which must dominate a home, I consented to write that letter and to do many other things which were a natural consequence of it. When your reply came, I recognized the good sense of it at once; I knew, as any man of the world must know, that my poor boy cannot be wholly absolved, that it take two to make an elopement no less than a marriage. I knew—but women have not our penetration and common reasonableness, our sagacity, shall I say?

“Lady Fergusson,” he continued, “could not take that view, and compromise made me, in that moment of stress and disaster, when the Hall and all it stood for seemed to be toppling about us like a house of cards, compromise made me as wax in her hands.

“I have come now, in humility and shame, to apologize for my share of this most lamentable quarrel, and to ask you, for the sake of my poor wife, to overlook it, to forget it, and once more to show your magnanimity by coming to the Hall and doing something to relieve that poor distraught creature’s pain.

"I ask nothing for myself," he concluded. "I merely grovel. But for her sake you will come, won't you? No one knows her symptoms as you do. In no one has she such confidence."

I had listened to the harangue without a word, but not without many thoughts. Chiefly had I been wondering if husband and wife were in collusion, or if they were really acting independently. To this day I don't know.

As he came to an end, he advanced to me with an extended hand, which I took.

"I will come to the Hall to-morrow," I said. "But I should like as much publicity to be given to your new friendly attitude as to the hostile one now terminating. I count on you to let others know, as well as myself, that you have reason to be ashamed of your conduct towards me."

"How?" he asked blankly.

"I must leave that to you," I said.

I was relieved that the hatchet was buried, not because I had been incommodeed by the feud to any great extent, but quarrels are not in my line, and this one was uncomfortable to the village. More than uncomfortable: degrading.

It was humiliating, for example, to one who

would wish every one to be dependent and honest, to see the embarrassment into which some of my neighbours could be plunged when I had come suddenly upon them while they were talking with Sir Edmund or Lady Fergusson. They had to decide in a moment which side to be on, whether to acknowledge me or not. I was, of course, in the long run, of infinitely more use to them than the Hall people could be: but wealth is wealth, and position is position, and poor human nature is poor human nature and ever will be. I don't expect it to change, but I cannot bear to be a cause of plunging it into its less admirable moods.

Our community was too small for the Hall people and the doctor to be at enmity; and a large part of a country doctor's duty is to act as cement, a fuser of classes, and while the vendetta held how could I be this?

But if a sigh of relief went up when it was known that I had been seen to drive into the Hall gates again, no one emitted it with more genuine heartiness than the rector, who had been put in a peculiarly awkward position. For although my friend of many years' standing, he had not, poor fellow, enough courage to take any stand in

the matter. I am not blaming him. The church does not train men to take a very strong stand on such occasions, nor indeed require recruits from the ranks of the independent and outspoken. Clerics, it is true, can become approximately courageous and frank, but preferment usually precedes the operation. Your country rector or vicar keeps himself as free from trouble as possible—very wisely—and listens to all sides even if he is not a partisan of all sides.

The Fergussons were too important for our rector even to contemplate the risk of losing them. So far as his church was concerned, he was safe, as I was not an attendant; but I was on this committee and that with both Sir Edmund and himself; we were all three of us governors of the almshouses. I had brought the rector's numerous children into the world; I was even godfather to one of them. The rector was continually coming to me for advice. My usefulness was as necessary to him, or at any rate as comforting, as the Hall's prestige, patronage and port.

Both of us he had, of course, held reprehensible in a very high degree for the effect on his parishioners of the defiance of morality involved

in Ronnie and Rose's escapade. He blamed the Fergussons for providing a Ronnie, and me for my association, although so vicarious, with Rose. How could he expect his simple flock to keep in the straight path, he asked, if the seventh commandment was treated with such contempt by the sons and daughters of the rich and exalted? He felt that his stewardship was under a cloud, even though Ronnie was merely a visitor among us from India and Rose from Wilton Place. Both had been children under him, when he was young and far more energetic than now. If they had weakened and fallen, was it not a reflection on his own zeal?

Mrs. O'Gorman told me something of the good man's line of self-torturing argument when I called on her one day, for he did not himself dare to present the case to me.

"What do you think the old fellow's saying now?" she said. "He's saying that if any of the husbands and wives in his congregation—Joe Smithers, for example, and Alice Leith—were to bolt together for the bad motive, he'd have not a word to reply to them if they were to say they did

it because Captain Fergusson and Mrs. Holt had made a break.

"‘Rubbish! my dear sir,’ I said to him. ‘People don’t argue like that; at least not honestly: only for effect. And people don’t wait for examples; they do what they want if they have the courage, but for the most part they do nothing at all, because they’re cowards.’

“It takes more courage, I told him, to do what Captain Fergusson and Mrs. Holt have done than to resist temptations; and my own belief is that no temptation worth the name ever is resisted. It’s only resisted when it’s pretending to be strong. Passion isn’t resisted; but mercifully there’s very little of it in England. What we call passion is usually a mixture of a certain amount of loneliness and a certain amount of curiosity and a certain amount of appetite and a tremendous desire to escape from what one is doing and have an adventure. But passion, burning hot and self-sacrificing—there’s very little!

“The rector,” she went on, “actually had the nerve to congratulate himself on the good conduct of the parish. He seemed to think it’s due to his sermons. I put him right. ‘My dear man,’

I said, ‘it’s not your sermons; it’s the want of opportunity.’ ”

“You’re so uncompromising, Mrs. O’Gorman,” I said. “And you put into speech what other people only dare to think, and sometimes not even that. It’s a great privilege to be Irish.”

“Well,” she said, “all I hope is that that poor child of yours is happier with her soldier than she ever was with her solicitor.”

“Barrister,” I corrected.

“Barrister,” she said. “I know he was a barrister, but I wanted to be alliterative. Don’t forget that my father was a scholar and a poet, and he taught us to make phrases.”

Rose—the older Rose—used to write regularly. They were living at Kwala Lumpur, in the Straits Settlements, and Ronnie was doing well with rubber. He would never be really strong again, but they seemed to be happy. I wrote regularly in reply and sent news of Rose the less, whose perplexity about her mother’s disappear-

ance and the change of home was no longer acute. In the first instance Eustace had told her that her mother had gone away across the sea, and left it vaguely there. To a child of five such voyages may seem natural.

“What message shall I give to your mother?” I wanted to ask, but I never did; nor did Rose send any message to her daughter. It seemed better to let the tie relax and gradually cease to be. Rose was never one to ask for things “both ways.”

Eustace meanwhile was still in the Argentine, and it was three years before he returned to England. His work at Buenos Aires had led to various profitable ventures into which he had been glad to throw himself as he shrank more and more from the idea of resuming life in London. The house in Wilton Place being let furnished at a high rent, and Rose being safe with me, why should he return? The hymnist may ask, with an outraged wonderment in his voice, “Can a mother’s tender care cease towards the child she bare?” but my experience is that it can do so quite easily. I have watched it in the process. As for a father’s tender care for the child he engendered, that

often never begins to exist at all. Eustace, at any rate, endured separation from his daughter with exemplary fortitude.

At the end of three years he was ready, however, to face the music again, and a letter arrived saying that he would come down for the weekend to see Rose and talk things over.

He duly arrived, very grey, but looking strong and hard and handsome. He watched Rose very carefully at lunch, but seemed to have no wish to be alone with her—almost a fear that he might have to be. Rose studied him gravely, too, but merely answered his questions and volunteered nothing. I have had all my life only one rule of conduct with regard to children, and that is to treat them as if they were grown up; I ask their advice, consult with them, even conspire; and great has been my regard in consequence. But Eustace was one of those men who too consciously come down a peg or two with the young, and Rose was made uneasy. She disappointed him by her ignorance of the Argentine and expressed no interest when her father told her that in sailors' language Buenos Aires became Bows and Arrows.

I had been troubled by the fear that he would want to take Rose away and try the experiment of being a father to her: but it was a false alarm. Once again I had been guilty of the folly of anticipating disaster—a foible to which human nature is ever too prone.

Eustace had many plans, but they did not embrace any intimate association with his flesh and blood. Having satisfied himself of my genuine desire to keep Rose, he told me some of them. He was selling most of the Wilton Place furniture, keeping only enough for a small service flat. He would spend most of his week-ends in the Dormy House at Bellingdon (what golf and tobacco can do for bachelors, widowers and the separated, no pen can ever compute!), but would like to come down to me occasionally, if I had no objection.

“I don’t think I am the best companion for a child of Rose’s age,” he said. “When she is older I hope that she may come and live with me, but just now I am both unsettled and unhappy and I should not be able to give her sufficient attention. She should go to school, I think, and then part at least of the holidays—the summer holi-

days—she and I could spend together by the sea. I might do a little sailing."

Of the other Rose he said nothing. Nor did I mention her. But Rose the less was like enough to her mother (her double in expression, in certain moods) for him inevitably to have her in his thoughts whenever the child was present. Except at meals, however, she was careful to be absent.

Meanwhile Rose was growing up. When Eustace returned she was eight and I did not want better company. In herself she was interesting, and it was interesting also to compare her with her mother at the same age: I almost felt sometimes as if both were present. She was more with me than the other Rose had been, for I was now less often out and away, having a younger man to take the harder work: and when I was away it was for shorter periods because the car was so much swifter than poor old Silver. Another reason was that this Rose was less friendly with the neighbours: not because of any natural shy-

ness, but because she did not receive the same quality of welcome. The little Rose of twenty years earlier, whose father had died suddenly, was more acceptable than the little Rose of to-day, whose mother had run away from husband and child with another man—and that man the heir to the Hall. We are often not logical in our censorious moods; and one of the last things to go, in the decay of feudalism, will be respect for the Great House. No one was so mean or courageous as to refuse Rose's acquaintance; but she must have felt instinctively that she was a little under a cloud and therefore have been the more prepared to keep within the home borders.

She was, however, as welcome as sunshine in both adjoining territories—the Westerleys' and the Sturgis's. Colonel Westerley, who was getting very blind, found her invaluable as a guide. Again and again I have listened to them on their tours round the beds, Rose's clear little voice raised (for he was getting deaf too) to keep him in touch with the progress of every plant.

"This is where the fritillaries are"—she had great difficulty with some of the names. "There

are two new purple speckled ones and three white."

"Now we're opposite the auriculas. The yellow ones are terrific."

"Oh dear, how the rain has broken down the tulips!"

"Now we're opposite the hedge-sparrow's nest. Wait a minute while I see if there are any more eggs. No, only three still."

So she would mark the changes of each morning, meanwhile leading the gentle old warrior by the hand.

The three Sturgis sisters—though none of them was destined to soar to the realms of bliss as Mrs. Julius Greville—fulfilled part of the destiny that the other Rose, all unconsciously, had planned for them, by becoming the most solicitous foster-mothers to her daughter. Out of their unselfishness and their leisure they suggested that Rose should go to them for lessons: a proposal that I was very glad to accept; and so it came about that the eldest gave Rose an hour a day with pencil and paint brushes in the studio (Rose's grandfather's studio), and the other two each an hour in more general instruc-

tion. Having a full measure of the Quaker placidity to keep them contented with their lot, they had no wish to roam, and were thus ever to be depended upon.

Not that their lot was to be despised, for they had turned Theodore's house into a very beautiful serene place. It was a Georgian house, panelled in white, with many recesses; and the three sisters had filled these with blue china. The gods dispense their gifts capriciously, and upon these descendants of a sect vowed to hostility to the arts and graces they had conferred the most exquisite taste. A series of provident ancestors had put them into a position to gratify most of their wishes, and their home kept pace with modern culture in all its quieter aspects.

Rose, you see, if she had not many friends, had very good ones. Her chief lack was the chief lack of many only children—contemporaries. How much happier she would have been had she had playmates of her own age, I cannot

say; but it is absurd to pretend that without them she was unhappy.

And this I can say with certainty: she kept me young. She did not actually transform me into a contemporary, but she so arranged it that there was very little awkwardness or fear between us. I am not pretending to have been in her complete confidence, I am merely stating the fact that we were under very little constraint together.

Even had we been real contemporaries, how could we really have known each other! A man may guess at a man's thoughts, may fairly safely measure him by himself; but how can a man guess at a girl's thoughts? Speech reveals so few of them. If while one is speaking twenty words one can be thinking of a hundred different things, what of the silent pauses? How they must teem! Where was my Rose when her blue eyes looked through their black lashes into space? How could I follow her unaided? Or would she have aided me? Not would, but could. Could she have told me? Could any of us tell all our thoughts in any given hour? Even if ships that passed in the night signalled to each other the

whole passenger list there would always be a few of the steerage and some of the crew unnamed. And if those were revealed, there would still be a stowaway!

One matter never mentioned between Rose and me was her mother's *faux pas*. What the child knew about this I did not discover, or wish to. I am old-fashioned enough to prefer to talk of grown-up matters only with grown-up people. The longer the gaiety and happiness of children can be unclouded by knowledge of the difficulties and disasters which can proceed from our emotional instincts, the better. So far as I was concerned Rose was ignorant of her mother's rebellion. We talked about her as a child, but we did not touch on recent history. English families are marvellous in their capacity to regulate conversational reservations.

One funny little pet turn of speech to which Rose was addicted comes back to me very vividly as I write. Every one has favourite locutions,

and Rose had the habit of prefacing many of her remarks with the phrase "As a matter of fact"; only, being mostly in a hurry to express herself, she used to contract the last three words to one: "As a maffact." Very few minutes could pass, when we were together and she was unburdening herself on this or that question, without her beginning a sentence: "As a maffact, Dombeen."

When the War came Rose was thirteen and I was sixty-five; and we were therefore both non-combatants. But it did not leave us—any more than any one else—untouched; for I was old enough to be saddened and shocked by the calamities that it bred; and Rose was young enough to be ripe for the new Hedonism which the peace inaugurated and which is still in full swing. Ronnie, the other Rose told me, longed to be in it, but was too delicate, and they remained on their estate throughout its lengthy course.

The War found the old Colonel still living, but he did not long survive. He was not of the kind

that spends its breath in lamenting the decadence of the Army in present times—I never heard him couple the Service and the dogs—but he had had his little autobiographical weaknesses, in which border skirmishes played no inconspicuous part, and in the presence of the gigantic drama in Belgium and France he found his occupation gone. No one wanted to listen to him any more; and he was too aged and infirm to be of any use. The War must have hit countless other retired officers in this way and in a moment have dried up their streams of reminiscence and emptied all their boasts. The Colonel was, however, a rural gentleman and not a frequenter of clubs, and his lot was comparatively easy; but I saw a steady decline in his strength, and he did not long survive the death of two of his grandsons in the Battle of Mons.

The Colonel was not our only loss. Mrs. O'Gorman had been declining for some time, and in the early spring she also left us.

I have been at many death-beds, and at most the grief was that of the living rather than the dying. Nature has mercifully arranged that most people are ready for the end—even look forward to it. Suffering or weakness has broken down their resistance: the goal they desire is peace. Others, with more fight in them, morphia lulls into acquiescence. But Mrs. O'Gorman needed no drugs, nor were there tears to distress her. Being the last of her clan her house was uninherited by relations. Only the faithful Julia, her servants and I were about. Steadily and quietly her flame lowered and was extinguished.

"I'm ready to die," she said, "but it wouldn't be true to say I should want to if I had strength. It's a muddling old world, but one hates the dark. And I like to know what's going on. I should have liked to see your new Rose growing up. And that other Rose, poor darling, I don't like leaving her. And my little Peek, it will be horrid not to be able to pat him and give him his sugar.

"Perhaps when we're dead," she went on, "we can still watch our friends. If so, you can be

very sure I shall be watching you. But don't worry. I won't move the furniture or bother you with manifestations. I'll simply be looking on, and if there's any means by which a spirit can add to the content of a living friend, you can be sure I shall apply it. But there can't be," she added, "or we should all be happier.

"It's a sin," she said another time, "that all we can leave are our twopenny-halfpenny possessions. Why can't we leave our brains? I don't pretend that mine are particularly desirable, but they would be a godsend to that stupid woolly Mrs. Standsted, for example. It's a pity I can't hand them on to her."

To the end she kept up her spirit and to the end she teased poor Julia.

"Have you ordered your mourning yet?" she asked her once.

Julia's reply was a sound of protest and a sob.

"But I want you to. I told you to. All this fuss about a simple little matter like dying is so ridiculous. Don't you want me to be happy in heaven, Julia?"

More sobs.

"Now listen. I command you to get your mourning. I want to see if it becomes you. Why shouldn't I? A young bride is allowed to see the bridesmaids who are to follow her to the church; why should an old widow woman be prevented from seeing what her chief mourner will look like?"

Nothing, however, could get Julia to consider death a subject matter for discussion, or as anything but a gaunt, grisly, abnormal happening.

"I hope they don't insist on one's entering heaven the very instant one dies," Mrs. O'Gorman said at another time. "That won't suit me at all. What I want is a really long sleep first—weeks and weeks of it. What do you think, Julia, will they be in such a hurry?"

Poor Julia, all this was hard to bear; but when the old lady's soul and body did at last part company and her will was made public, it was found that the legacy to her faithful companion was ten times larger than she had foreshadowed in conversations. The poor of the village were remembered also, and both the Roses had little mementoes.

We lost the Fergussons too, although not by death. They had not long remained at the Hall after the burial of the hatchet, even though my invaluable attendance was theirs once more. They had become restless and discontented. The Hall estate had been bought for Ronnie to succeed to; and of what use was it now? Sir Edmund had nothing to do—his interest in tree-planting and general improvements disappeared, and he gradually took a dislike to the place. The result was that they left for one of the Continental health resorts—Aix-les-Bains, I think it was. When they went I decided to take no new patients, and gradually allowed my practice to pass to others, and when Mrs. O'Gorman died I retired altogether.

I said something a little while back about Rose and her ignorance of her mother's flight—or, at any rate, silence regarding it. That was when she was a child. But later, when she had reached the teens, references to her mother gradually

came naturally into her conversation, and she would even ask me about her.

"Tell me about mother, Dombeen," she would say. "Was she like me? Mrs. O'Gorman says that our voices are just the same."

"Did you like her better than me?" She wanted to know this very badly.

I have no doubt that she had collected other views as well as mine and had a fairly sound idea of the situation.

"Of course it was naughty to run away from father," she began once, after one of Eustace's visits, "but——" Here she broke off with a suspicion of a chuckle.

I was careful not to ask her to finish the sentence.

Sometimes she propounded terrible posers, which were not made any simpler by being dropped from clear skies in the midst of talk on the most innocent of themes. I remember one evening I was pointing out the constellations.

I had just said, "That's Orion's Belt," when she inquired, "Do you think, Dombeen, that husbands and wives, when they love other people, ought to go on living together?"

"But that has nothing to do with astronomy," was my feeble reply.

Another time, after another of Eustace's visits: "What do men look like when their hearts are broken?"

"If I found I had married the wrong man I should leave him," was another announcement. (This was when she was sixteen.) "As a maffact, Dombeen, I expect I shall make a mistake like that. I don't see how one can help it. I've always got tired of everything up to now, so why should it be different with a husband?"

This was the War virus working with a vengeance! We all had to adjust ourselves to that, we old people.

I don't know how it is with my contemporaries, but the truth about me is that at thirty I was much surer of myself and of accepted dogma than I am at seventy. At thirty, if I had heard a young girl remark that chastity is absurdly over-rated, I should have been shocked; to-day I find myself capable of wondering if it may not be true: if we do not, in protecting that shadow, allow much sound substance to deteriorate? Doctors see more than most spectators, and with

these eyes I have watched many and many an open-natured girl shrivel into an old maid and her finer juices turn to gall—all because she was not wooed and had not the courage to defy convention and woo for herself. The older that one grows the smaller is the number of sins. I can enumerate very few now, and if I live much longer there will be only one, and that is meanness.

“Aren’t our bodies our own, to do as we like with?” is a question that may be said to be in the air in these days. And how explain to any young person, girl or boy, that the answer is No?

Rose was not, so far as I could tell, as modern as this. But of course I could not hope for complete knowledge of her, even if I had probed for it. December and April are not confidants: at most they can be sympathetic. Such insight as I had into her philosophy and creed of living had to be gathered from generalities: from her comments on the day’s news, from her selective readings aloud from the papers, from her attitude to local misdemeanour: whether lenient or censorious. Lenience was certainly her tendency. In the idiom of to-day she was “for” all insur-

rectionists; she could even find it in her heart to be sorry for miners. "I don't wonder they strike, poor things. The mystery is how they can go on digging that horrid black stuff at all, in the pitch dark too, no matter how much you pay them."

It was one afternoon when Rose was eighteen that I realized that she was no longer merely a girl. Suddenly the peace of the garden was invaded by a series of snorts and explosions, and a motor-car rushed up the drive—one of those absurd little cars, very small and low, like an important roller skate, with just room for two, and a naked nymph in silver and without shame poised over the bonnet by way of mascot. The kind of vehicle brought into existence to meet the demands of second-lieutenants. Immediately afterwards I was told that a gentleman wished to see me, and behold there he was, in the sitting-room—a tall young man with a tiny moustache exactly the same width as his nose, and purple

socks. Although obviously not lacking in self-assurance, he advanced rather nervously.

"What can I do for you?" I asked. "You know I have retired from practice."

"O, it isn't about any old malady," he explained. "Thank Heaven I'm as fit as a fiddle. The fact is, I wanted to ask your advice. It's about—Miss, Miss Holt."

"Yes?" I said. I knew instinctively what was coming, but it was no business of mine to make it any easier for the young bandits who proposed to carry off this treasure.

"Well," he said, "the fact is, you know, she's —there's no one so topping; or perhaps you don't know?"

"Why should I be ignorant?" I asked. "Because I'm so old?"

"Well, I don't mean that," he replied. "But you're her guardian, aren't you? And living here as she does . . ."

"Oh, I see," I said. "You mean that only strangers can discover how delightful people can be?"

"No, not exactly that," he stammered, "although, as a matter of fact, you know, one does

rather take one's own people for granted. My sister Belle now—to me she's the stodgiest kind of old thing, but you should see the fellows after her. Like flies. They're not as keen as I am about Miss Holt though."

"Then I must suppose," I said, "that Rose—Miss Holt—is much nicer away from home than she is when she is there."

"Oh, no!" he replied, "I didn't mean that. I'm sure she's always charming."

"Well, if neither of these is the reason, I am bound," I said, "to fall back on the theory that I am too old to recognize sweetness when I see it."

He was in a hole now and showed it. I liked him for his confusion. I liked to think that any young man, particularly one who had been through a war so much more destructive of good manners and good morals and honest standards of living than of militarism, should still be capable of embarrassment.

"Do you mind," he asked, "if I smoke?"

"Not at all," I said. "Every one smokes now. Tobacco is the next thing to mother's milk."

He took a cigarette from a gold case and tapped it. "I'm afraid it's only a gasper," he explained.

"I'd rather it was a pipe," I said.

"Pipes don't appeal to me any more," he replied. "I took to cigarettes in France and I've never gone back."

A few whiffs seemed to give him courage. "I came to see you," he said at last, "because I want to marry Miss Holt."

I was silent for a minute, during which I was taking him all in, and reviewing Rose's life, and seeing them together, and speculating on the future, and realizing how different this happy-go-lucky youth, with a touch of effrontery and few thoughts for anything but motoring and dancing, was from the husband I had been wishing for her. It is extraordinary what a lot can be thought about in sixty seconds. Meanwhile he puffed his gasper and nursed his little moustache and swung a leg with so much purple sock now exposed that a suspender was visible too.

"Do you live about here?" I asked at last. "I don't seem to remember your face."

"I'm staying with my uncle, Major Wilkinson," he said. "My name's Sibthorp."

"And what do you do?"

"Well, I'm not doing anything at the moment. I've only just been demobbed. I may possibly go back to Oxford. But I'd rather make some money. There's talk of the mater setting me up as a chicken-farmer. There's a devil of a lot of eggs wanted."

"And what did you do in the war?"

"I was in the Air Force. Jolly lucky too. I never had a scratch."

"But you scratched a Hun or two, I hope?"

"I fancy I did," he said.

"Any medals?" I said.

"I got the D.S.O.," he replied simply.

"You must let me shake your hand," I said, "but remember that it is entirely without prejudice to the other matter. Do you happen to know how Miss Holt feels about it?"

"Oh, I think she thinks I'm a pretty decent sort," he said.

"Why do you like her?" I asked. "She doesn't rouge."

"I loathe rouge," he said warmly.

I shook him by the hand again—again warning him that it was without prejudice.

"Does she like you at all?" I asked.

"She likes jazzing with me, I know," he assured me.

"Life isn't a dance," I replied.

"No, of course not," he said. "I know that. I know it's a jolly serious affair."

"And you are proposing that Miss Holt should help you with the poultry?" I suggested.

"She'd love it," he said. "It's a great lark."

"This means," I said, "that you would have to live in the country, and give constant attention to the work. No more jazzing, and very little motoring except to the market? Do you think that's an existence for a girl of brains and ambition and high spirits, who happens to be an artist too?"

His face took on an expression of perplexity.

"But—but—she'd be married," he said.

"So you think that love in an isolated cottage surrounded by roosters and incubators, with only one human companion, is a sufficient paradise to offer her? Upon my word, you seem to me to be uncommonly sure of your fascination. She

would have to be very fond of you to give up her present home and pursuits, even with the society of a very aged man occasionally thrust upon her, and take to chicken-farming. Doesn't it occur to you that that would be a big sacrifice?"

"But—but one must begin," he said. "The poultry business would only be a start. We might go on to much bigger things."

"It will be time to talk about marriage," I said, "when you have made some of that progress."

"Then you refuse to consider me?" he asked ruefully.

"Not at all," I said. "It is not for me to decide anything. Rose has a father. But I should certainly put what obstacles I could in your way, until you had something better to propose as a means of livelihood than a chicken-farm in the air."

"But you don't forbid me to see her, or anything like that?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course not. And I couldn't if I wanted to. See as much of her as she wants."

"And if she told you that I—if she ever said

anything about marrying me—you wouldn't put a spoke in the wheel, would you?"

"I should do nothing to discourage her," I said—"not from any desire to see her marry you, but for the opposite reason. Old though I am, I have not forgotten that forbidden fruit is the most attractive. So I shouldn't forbid you."

"I say that's brainy," he said, with genuine admiration. "I should never have thought of that."

"May I ask," I said, "if you have put your case to Miss Holt?"

"Not in so many words," he replied. "I thought I would see you first."

"That's rather an unusual course nowadays, isn't it?"

"Well, that's how the mater felt, anyway. It was her idea."

"You talked it over with your mother?"

"Yes."

"And Rose is ignorant of this visit?"

"Yes," he said.

I shook hands with him again.

"You are a very remarkable young man," I said: "You respect your mother's wishes and you don't like rouged girls. I most cordially

hope you will succeed in the egg market. But as for Rose, I can tell you something. Rose is in love with nobody."

"How can you tell?" he asked.

"I happen to know her fairly well," I replied, "and to have kept her under a certain amount of observation."

"But—but—"

"You mean, once more, that I am too old? Maybe; but I guess that on this particular subject I am right. I'll tell her that you called. Good afternoon."

"Oh, sir," he said, "will you? Wouldn't it be better to say nothing about it and let me see her first?"

"It might be," I replied; "but that isn't the way that Miss Holt and I do things. We put the cards on the table. Good afternoon."

He walked moodily to his little runabout, cranked it, lighted another cigarette (although what use a cigarette can be in a thirty-mile gale such as he was about to create for himself, I have no notion) and was off.

He left me thinking that the chances are that if I live on another twenty years, to be ninety

—which I trust may not happen, even with the assistance of the new monkey-gland treatment—and I still retain a few faculties of hearing and speech and the simulacrum of a sympathetic heart, some young spark of the future will endeavour to engage my interest to help him in his courtship of Rose's daughter—some young spark not yet born, desiring a bride not yet born. That would seem to be my destiny. But perhaps by 1940 there will be no such tedious preliminaries: nothing but capture and possession—and awaking. Or will the rhythm of life have reasserted itself and old-fashioned prejudices have returned? We move in circles.

During dinner that evening I said to Rose, "There was a young fellow here this afternoon asking after you."

"Archie Sebright, I suppose," she said.

"No," I said. "Some one who dances with you, and——"

"Reggie Saunderson, of course."

"No."

"Who was it, then?"

"He had a very small moustache," I said, "and he came in an even smaller car."

"Oh, Jack Nimmo."

"No," I said. "He had purple socks, with clocks, and showed too much of them."

"That must have been Claude Musters."

"No," I said.

"You must tell me," she insisted. "Why are you such a tease?"

"His name was Sibthorp," I said.

"Oh!" Rose replied, "he's staying with the Wilkinsons. He's rather a nuisance, but he did well in the War, every one says. It's terrible: the bores that did well in the War! What did he want?"

"Nothing much," I said. "Only to marry you."

Rose laughed. "Like his cheek," she said.

"None the less," I said, during our dessert—and I have some rather good Taylor 1880 which deserves to be sipped slowly—"this question of marriage is bound to crop up now and then."

"Why?" Rose asked.

"Because you're a not repellent young woman, and the neighbourhood appears to be infested by Claudes and Reggies, and Nature is always urgent."

"But I don't want to marry any of them," she said, "or in fact any one at all. Why can't we go on as we are? Why is life always changing?"

"I wish it wasn't," I said; "but the law of life is change. We either go forward—or backward. Every quiet little time such as this that I spend with you, alone, talking and not (which is the true curse of Adam) getting ready to do anything else, I am full of fearfulness, just because I know that there is no standing still. They are all stolen. To you they may be dull; to me these moments are beautiful."

Rose put her hand on mine. "They're not dull," she said. "I love them too."

She glanced at the clock.

"There!" I said. "You're spoiling it! It is exactly as I said. What do you look at the time for?"

"Well," she replied, "I promised Claude I'd show him a new step to-night; but he's not com-

ing till half-past nine. We've got nearly a whole hour."

I sighed. But what's the use?

"Let's go on talking about marriage," she said, drawing her chair closer. "Why should I marry? Every girl doesn't. Why should I? Some one in the paper said only the other day that there are many more women than men and therefore lots of them must be single. Why shouldn't I be one?"

"If you want to, there's no earthly reason why you shouldn't," I said. "But we can't arrange these things. At any moment you may fall in love, and what then? Marriage has a way of following love."

"Ye-e-s," said Rose. "But one needn't fall in love. Lots of people don't. You never did—at any rate, if you did, marriage didn't follow it."

"No," I said, "I didn't. Nature marked me for a bachelor and destiny made me a vicarious father. I have been more or less of a vicarious father, Rose, ever since I was twenty-seven, and now I'm sixty-eight: forty-one years of it! I've had no time to fall in love, your mother and you have kept me so busy. But tell me about this

young warrior. Why should he want to marry you? Have you given him any encouragement?"

"No," said Rose. "Except to listen to him and show him steps. They all want to talk and be shown steps."

"It's a country fit for heroes to dance in," I said. "And what about the poultry farm?"

"Oh, he told you that, did he?" Rose asked.

"Yes, he told me that. The demand for eggs is something priceless, what?"

"Let's forget him," said Rose. "Anyway," she resumed a moment later, "why must there always be marriage? Marriages so often go wrong. Look at Dulcie Lenox—she's left her husband already. Look at the divorce cases! Why can't two people love and get the best of life and then go their own way again?"

"It's for the sake of society," I said, "the human family. We've all got to help to keep that together."

"Why should we?" Rose asked. "We didn't ask to be born."

"No, but being born, we must play the game. It's part of the contract. It's our payment for the privilege of existing at all."

"Just chivalry?"

"If you like to put it like that. But most of us are rather proud of the obligation."

"And if we say no; that we don't care a pin about the human family; all we care about is our own happiness, what then?"

"Well, then we're traitors, that's all. We've been found wanting."

"It's rather a shame, isn't it, to force so much responsibility on people who never asked for it?"

"Yes, I think it is. But life without responsibility wouldn't be worth anything. That's a conclusion I've reached after sixty-eight years."

"Oh, don't count up! You're much too proud of those figures. But when did you discover it? When you were eighteen, like me?"

"No, when I was eighteen I thought more or less as you do; only not quite so freely, because there had been no great war to break down our ideals and set up materialism and belief in the divine right of every individual to be selfish and anti-social."

"Do you think that's what we are?"

"Too many people are. But I'm quite "

scious that they may be right and the others wrong. In fact, the older I grow, the more convinced I am that every one, however wrong, has some right in him, and every one, however right, some wrong."

"Well, I'm not going to marry for years and years," said Rose. "I'm going to paint first. Art will be my husband."

"With a little dancing with human partners thrown in?" I suggested.

"Yes, of course."

At this moment the bell rang, indicating that the pupil had arrived, and for the next hour my would-be Rosa Bonheur was showing steps.

How few things we should do if we had time to examine carefully every action and its possible consequences before we committed ourselves to it! I for one, probably—but one never knows—instead of encouraging Rose in her drawing and painting should have discouraged her; for it led straight to London, and when your children,

your own or your foster-children, get to London, they are lost. New lives begin, with new parents—for London is father and mother too. Careers have to be, I suppose, and leading strings must be cut—but O the severance of heart-strings that that operation involves as well!

Anyway, I had taken an immense interest in Rose's sketches, and often sat with her while she made them, and marvelled—being a hopeless duffer at such work—as the swift deft touches transferred the landscape to the paper: sky and earth and water. She may not have been remarkable, but to my eyes she was as clever as any one sketching nature need be. Her portraits were good too: at any rate, life-like enough to provoke cries of delight from the villagers as they recognized their neighbours. She was a straightforward performer: she cubed nothing and abhorred a vortex; but artists are curiously impressionable people, visitors to this planet rather than dwellers upon it, and at any moment she might become as wild as the wildest. And I am not surprised: the power to splash colour about must naturally lead to experimentalism.

In those days, however, Rose was in the old

and sober tradition, and the desire to paint filled her soul.

At last the go-fever broke out. She had been to London—that promoter of restlessness—to stay with a girl artist friend and show her work to some experts and see the exhibitions, and she came back glowing with excitement and plans. She returned with her hair intact too, to my great joy. I had nursed a terror that she might bob it.

“How much money have I got?” was one of the first things she said to me after dinner.

During the meal I had heard the story of her adventures. How she had stayed with her friend Vera Gray in her studio at Chelsea. It was on the Embankment, looking out on the river.

“And O!” she exclaimed, “the river is exactly what Whistler made it. I mean—exactly how he painted it.”

I interrupted her to say that no studied compliment could ever have pleased that painter so

much as her hurried slip; but she didn't want to hear me; she wanted to talk and tell.

They had slept in the studio, in a little gallery up a ladder, where there was also a bathroom. They had cooked their own breakfast, but had gone out for other meals. I had no idea what Vera's coffee was like! And her cups and saucers and plates: all blue and white, from Portugal: it cost—well, I'd never guess how cheap it was.

I asked her if she had called on her father.

"No."

"Oughtn't you to have done so?"

"I suppose I ought," she answered, "but—well, as a maffact, he would probably have disapproved of Chelsea and made me stay with him. For another reason, I didn't really think he wanted to see me. We've very little in common, you know, Dombeen."

"It's a wise child who knows when she doesn't want her father to know she's in town," I said. "I'm afraid you're right," I added: "you haven't much in common. But you oughtn't to presume on that, ought you?"

"Why not?" she asked, and upon my word,

I couldn't reply. Why should children be dutiful any more than their parents?

If Eustace took no interest in Rose, why should Rose take interest in him? Logically, it is the older who should set the example: the more mature, the person who is responsible for the child's existence. I doubt very much if there is any natural affinity between parents and children: pride of ownership on the one side and dependence on the other leads to the creation of a bond. Remove babies at birth and do not let them meet their mothers again until they are grown up, and (in spite of the romantic and sentimental novelists) I doubt if there would be any natural recognition, any calling of the deeps.

Vera, Rose went on, had done a little work—not much—and then they had gone out to visit other studios, where Vera's friends lived. I could have no idea how jolly they all were. People talked about the jealousy of artists, but for her part she didn't believe a word of it. There they were, all so keen and simple, wearing the most delightful old clothes, pleased to see each other, pleased to praise each other's work—genuinely, too—absolutely genuinely—and then di-

rectly it was too dark to go on, or they didn't feel in the mood, off they went to dinner at one of the Soho places, and then they either talked about painting, ever so interestingly, or danced or sang. It was the most wonderful life.

But I mustn't think for a moment that they were slackers. Not a bit of it. As a maffact, they worked frightfully hard. But artists, I must remember, don't divide up their lives into work and play as other people do—clerks and merchants and lawyers and so on: they mix the two together. That's what makes them so delightful.

"They all have such charming things," she said, looking round at my furniture—Victorian mostly, not old enough to be beautiful—with a kind of disdain. "No matter how poor they are, they always seem to have money for 'bits.' They're always on the lookout for them, and they have such wonderful eyes. They can see things under inches of dust. Going about among the old furniture and old curiosity shops with Vera and her friends was an education, and such a lark too! You and I must go over to Lowces-ter, Dombeen, and rout about in the old shops

there. I know so much more about things than I did a month ago. I know the difference between Heppelwhite and Chippendale and Spode and Crown Derby. And I mean to learn it all."

She had been to the National Gallery three times, and to the Tate, and to several little exhibitions, and to the Café Royal one evening, and to two plays. But the most terrific thing of all was this—she had seen John.

"John who?" I asked.

"Not John anything," she replied, shocked at my ignorance. "It's his last name, but no one ever calls him anything else—John the artist: much the strongest painter we've got. Vera asked him to come and see my things, and he came and he likes them. He says I ought to make a real name if I study properly and go to a life class and devote myself to drawing for a while. It's my drawing that's weak, he says."

It was then that Rose suddenly asked, after a brief silence, "How much money have I got?"

I told her that she had no money at all, unless her father chose to give her any. He reimbursed me more or less for what she cost me, and her school accounts and so forth had gone to him.

It was all very irregular; of course she ought to have an allowance by this time. She was eighteen.

Her face lost its radiance. "Must I ask him?" she said.

"It depends on what you want it for," I answered.

"I want to live in Chelsea," she said, "and really learn to paint."

"Oh!" I said. "If it had been for anything else I might have been able to contribute, but I can't for that. That is too drastic. You must ask your father. Besides," I said, "I could hardly bring myself to finance a scheme which leaves me so high and dry."

"Poor Dombeen!" she said. "But you'd soon get used to being alone. And I'd come down often for the week-end. As a maffact, you'd hardly miss me."

"Train up a child and away she goes," I quoted.

"But you wouldn't have me not be independent?" she asked.

"No," I said. "Everything is all right: just

as it should be. An old man must expect to lose a young girl just when she is most companionable. But you must concede him a little melancholy. After all, it is a compliment to you, so concede it purely in that light. It's as proper for me to regret your going as for you to want to go."

"You dear old thing!" she said. "I hate to leave you, but what should one do? If you absolutely needed me, of course . . . but you don't. You're strong, you go about, you have your prints and your gardening."

"And even if I hadn't," I said, "I should not allow you to stay. If I am to collapse, it shall not be an artist on the threshold of life with a passion to express herself in oils who shall bring my beef-tea. That would be too unfair. But you must understand that nothing can be done until your father consents."

"I'll write to him to-night," she said. "Unless you will?"

"No," I replied firmly. "I'll go a long way to help you, but I won't sign my own death warrant. No seaman beseeches to be marooned."

Eustace replied that he thought he might be willing, but it would be well to discuss the matter properly. Would she stay with him for a few days and bring some of her work with her.

"How can I show it to him?" she asked.

"You must," I said. "After all, he is your father."

"But it's so—so—personal," she said.

"Well?" I asked, when she came back a few days later.

"I've bored him terribly," she said.

"What makes you think so?"

"He never knew what to say. Besides, his habits are fixed. I ruined his breakfast because he couldn't read the paper. I would much rather he had read it, but he was trying to behave so beautifully and he made conversation instead. This means that he never caught up with the news all day, and that's a very serious thing. I made the awful mistake too of opening the paper before he did, before he came in—this was on the

first morning—and no woman, it seems, must do that.

"O dear, I'm not right at all. As a maffact, Dombeen, you've spoilt me. And I'm too impulsive. You mustn't be impulsive with men, except perhaps just one or two, and those only for a little while and when they're very pleased with themselves.

"I did other terrible things too. I used the telephone frivolously. I even rang up the exchange once just to ask the time, and he heard me. I had done it often enough when he was out, because my watch had stopped and his clock was away being mended; but he came in just as I was ringing and I never saw any one so pained.

"And Oh! I left the electric light burning in the hall all one night. He was perfectly nice and kind and polite, but I could see that every day something new was being inscribed on his heart, like Queen Mary's. I don't mean our Queen Mary; I mean the Queen Mary who lost Calais—the bloody one.

"He didn't like my painting at all," she went on, "but he was very gentle about it. He was always gentle—gentle and cool—and that is so

depressing after a while. Disturbing, too. He took me to the Tate Gallery on Saturday afternoon, and to the National on Sunday, and showed me the pictures he likes best. He has two photogravures after Leader in his bedroom."

"But have you decided anything?" I asked. It was all I wanted to know and she was postponing and postponing the moment of the verdict.

"Yes," she said, but without much enthusiasm.

"Well?"

"Well, he won't hear of independent rooms in Chelsea. He doesn't like Chelsea. It's too irresponsible, he says. But he agrees to a Hostel—he's inquiring about them now—and the Slade. I may go to the Slade and live in a Hostel, for three years. It isn't what I wanted, of course, but it's the thin end of the wedge. I'll be able to go to Chelsea to see Vera and the others pretty nearly whenever I like, and the Slade isn't so bad. Orpen was there and John was there. What do you think?"

"When do you want to begin?" I asked dully.

"Well, the next term," she said. "Isn't it wonderful?"

It was our last evening. To-morrow the little mawf was to fly away towards those great flames, London, Art, and Independence, all capable of scorching very acutely. To Rose the hours were all a prelude to adventure; to me a promise of loneliness. For so long this graceful, gay enthusiast had been lighting up my house; and now I was to be forsaken. At seventy that is no particular joke.

To what extent Rose had pondered on what might lightly be called the selfishness of her programme, I cannot say. Perhaps not at all, but I think that very unlikely. My own attitude to her desertion, although I did my best to make it whimsical, must have turned her thoughts that way. But having pondered, might she not very properly have decided that such selfishness was her only course? Our duty is not always to others. Comparatively lost as I was going to be, I certainly did not want her to make the sacrifice of remaining. Why should she? What right has seventy to cramp the style of twenty? Too many young people are harnessed—more than harnessed, shackled—to the old, for me to be willing to add to their number. I have

watched youthful lives being sapped and thwarted in this way ever since I have been in practice, and I had always vowed that never would I be guilty of a similar tyranny. And now here I was with the temptation!

But it was not the temptation that it might have been had Rose come to me and said, "Look here, Dombeen, I can't leave you all alone. It isn't fair. I'll give up this London scheme and we'll go on being happy together." Even then, however, I hope I should have been strong enough to say No. In fact, I know I should; for what is the use of binding a girl of eighteen or letting her bind herself? Art she might relinquish; but what would happen when Love appeared? How could I keep her to her promise then? Better face the music, take the fence, cut the knot now, and be brave about it.

We sat long after dinner on that last evening. Rose's boxes were packed, her room at the Hostel and her easel at the Slade awaited her. She had

said all her good-byes in the neighbourhood, and no doubt more than one of her dancing friends had her address in his pocket-book. In short, practically every boat was burnt. All our talk, therefore, was of the future. If Eustace was not too unwilling, she said, she should go to Paris after a while. As a maffact, Paris was, of course, the place. London was only a makeshift. She would probably go on to Paris anyway—father or no father. Because one must be thorough. London was looking up—everybody said so—Chelsea had produced some wonderful things—but for an artist Paris was the true Alma Mater. Even Chelsea had had to go to Paris first.

It was all a question of money. Surely when she was twenty-one her father would allow her something reasonable?

“Not for the purpose of doing anything of which he might disapprove,” I said.

O well, she would see. She would begin at the Slade, anyway, and make up her mind gradually. “But of course,” she repeated, “Paris is the place. Sooner or later I must be there. I can hear it calling all the while.”

Having said those words, Rose left the window

where she had been standing and walked into the garden, whither no doubt she expected me to follow her.

I was about to do so when there was a knock at the door and Suzanne entered, with a curious excited flush on her face.

She stood there a moment, as though trying to speak, and then, stepping aside, made room for some one in a black dress and veil, and was gone.

“Dombeen!” cried the stranger, and buried her thin, tired face on my shoulder.

Of what I said I have no memory. I can remember only stroking her head and hushing her like a child.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry,” I may have murmured; but it was foolish, for tears were her best friends.

“Rose?” she asked at last. “Is she here?”

I nodded.

“If only I could see her without her seeing me!”

"Wait a moment," I said, and went to the garden to look for Rose, but she had disappeared.

I returned to her mother and began to be practical. She had come in a car, and the first thing to do was to take her bag out and send it back. Then she consented to eat something, and while it was being prepared I had the story.

Ronnie and she had been on their way back to England. He had wanted to see his mother again and his father's executors too. But at Marseilles Ronnie had died. It was where her father had died thirty-six years before—how strange a coincidence!

Ronnie's death followed up a chill, which he had taken, she feared, on a visit to Theodore's grave. They had gone to see it directly after landing, and Ronnie now lay in the same cemetery, close by. Was not that remarkable?

Since then she had been travelling steadily towards her daughter and me. No one knew of her presence in England but Ronnie's mother, living now permanently at Torquay, who had been written to.

It was at this point that Rose—the other Rose—came back. I saw her across the lawn—her

dress shone among the shadows—but her mother's back being to the window, she could not see her too.

Making some excuse, I slipped out.

"Who is it?" Rose asked, with a startled look, and a voice almost of fear. "Is it——?"

"Yes," I said.

"What has happened? Is—is he dead?"

"Yes," I said.

She gave a little wailing cry and was gone.

"Rose! Rose!" I called, but she did not reply.

I went back to her mother and urged her to go to bed.

"Not yet," she said, adding that she would not be able to sleep. "There is so much to say, so much to know."

As she talked, dry-eyed now, for she had conquered her emotion—her tears were because she was at home at last, among old and happy associations once more—I was able to see how she had aged. But she did not look as though her life with Ronnie had been a failure. There was no careworn anxious suggestion; there was merely

sadness in her loss, and fatigue. She was still beautiful.

I did not want to ask any questions, and the principal one was answered by her general demeanour with regard to Ronnie: they had been happy.

"I regret nothing," her eyes seemed to say.

She had no plans. She did not know what she would do after leaving me. How was every one? Was Mrs. O'Gorman still living? No. She was sorry. She had been hoping to talk with her. How splendid, though, to find Suzanne!

She seemed to be shy of referring to Rose again. I could not help noticing it. Every silence seemed to be filled intensely with consideration of her relations with her child and her child's attitude to her. She must have given endless thought to this matter, but to be so near brought it all back more vividly and critically.

"I suppose——" she began once and stopped, and I knew that the rest of the sentence would have been—"she knows": meaning "she knows about me and Ronnie?" Did daughters, she must often have asked herself, forgive mothers who run away from them with other men?

Perhaps it was because her mind had travelled thus far that she suddenly said again, ‘Dom-been, remember this. No matter how sad I may seem to be, now and then, remember this: I regret nothing. Ronnie needed me more than any one.’

Then she became gayer and smiled her old smile.

“And you?” she said. “How are you? What beautiful white hair!”

“I am seventy,” I said. “Nothing else is the matter. But I always maintain that white hair is beautiful only on the heads of others.”

She came at last to Rose again by a more direct route. “Those pictures”—looking at the walls—“are they hers?”

I had told her in my letters of Rose’s painting.

I said that they were.

“Oh, but they’re very good,” she said. “I’m so glad. There should always be an artist in our family.”

Should I tell her of Rose’s career, due to begin to-morrow? My natural instinct, as always, was, at the moment, for fear of giving pain, to conceal

it; but I remembered my lesson, learned both from Rose and Rose, and told her.

She was silent for some time. "But where is she?" she then asked.

"She has gone to bed," I said, "most probably."

"Without coming to say good night to you? Isn't that strange?" She looked at me searchingly.

"She knew you were here," I said.

"She knew! How?"

"She saw you with me, from the garden."

"Oh!" said Rose. "Yes." She was silent again. "I'll go to bed now, I think," she said, and I led her upstairs.

"To-morrow your old room will be ready for you," I said. "It couldn't be to-night."

"I like this one," she said. "It's where you get the view between the two copper beeches. But Rose?" she went on. "I must just peep at her before I sleep."

I advised against it. "To-morrow," I said. "When you're not so tired."

No, now, or she could not rest.

I pointed out Rose's door and she tiptoed in.

In a moment she was on the landing again.

"It's empty!" she exclaimed. "The bed is untouched."

I tried to reassure her.

"But where is she? This is terrible," she repeated. "We must find her."

I told her not to be alarmed. Rose was probably walking off her disturbance of mind. The sudden appearance of her mother must, I know, have given her too much to think of, and she was doing what she often did in moments of high tension—she was fighting her perplexities under the open sky.

"Ah!" said Rose. "It would have been better for me not to have come back."

"Don't say so," I replied. "Go to your room now. I'll wait for Rose—perhaps I'll go and look for her, but I don't think that is necessary; these are safe parts. She is probably in the garden."

"She hasn't—you don't think—she hasn't gone away altogether?" her mother faltered.

"Good Heavens, no! She often does this, and with far less reason. I'll knock and reassure you very soon now"; and thus I got her to retire.

Rose came back some anxious hours later, at dawn. She was worn out.

It was as I had guessed. The poor child's castle in the air having collapsed, she had been collecting energy for the rebuilding. But this time there was to be a less alluring site: the castle must be on the prosaic earth and the foundations dug by the dull spade, duty.

All this her tired face told me.

"O Dombeen!" she said as she seized my arm and clung to it.

"I know," I said.

"Where is she?"

"In the Red Room."

"I'll go to her."

"To-night? So late?" I said. "I was wondering if it would not be better in the morning."

"No, now. For a moment only."

I left her at her mother's door.

I was up early the next day, but Rose—the younger Rose—for all her late hours, was before me.

I found her at the breakfast table dressed in her ordinary morning blue overall. She was wan.

"But what's this?" I asked. "Why aren't you ready for the train?"

"I'm not going," she said. "I've sent some telegrams."

"But——" I began.

"Please don't make it more difficult," Rose replied, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I hope you haven't countermanded the car," I said, after a few moments of swift thought; for I could see that something must be done.

"No—there was no hurry for that," she mumbled brokenly.

"Because I've got to go to London anyway," I said. "I was going with you," I added, as a mendacious but brilliant afterthought, "but I was keeping it as a surprise. I'll be back to-night."

And it was thus that I got away. I had realized directly I heard Rose's decision that this was no place for me. I was an interloper. Mother and daughter must solve their own problems, and solve them alone; they would be glad to be un-

observed as they reconnoitred to ascertain each other's position. I have stumbled upon that military phrase, but on second thoughts I recognize its fitness; for in a sense they were foes, as most women can be, and mother and daughter too often actually are. How they would have adjusted their relations had these fourteen estranging years not intervened, no one could say. They might have been happy; certainly they would often have been merry and care-free, for that was the natural tendency of both. Moreover, there might have been an extra bond—I have seen it often—in mutual refuge from the Master of the House. But between mothers and daughters a certain hostility, not unconnected with rivalry, is only too common, if not inevitable. For a mother, be she ever so sweet-natured and generous and proud of her daughter, is also a woman, and women love love, and hate the thought of the shelf, and resent the younger generation's vista of triumphs. Not until they are much older than Rose do they consent to retire from the lists, forgive their successors, and take with serenity to gardening and cards.

Whether or no Rose knew I was lying, I had no notion; but she acquiesced naturally enough and waved me a wistful good-bye.

I too had plenty to think of as the train bore me Londonwards. For everything had changed—Rose's return was a bomb-shell. Had she come back a day later when her daughter was established in her Hostel and the London machinery had begun, all would have been simpler. But now? I knew them both so well—the mother and the daughter equally determined on any course they undertook: the daughter, after her vigil, so bent upon sacrifice and capable even of extracting some pleasurable gall from it, and the mother so unwilling to cool young ardencies and spoil young hopes.

To which did I owe the greater allegiance? To the mother, of course. The girl was at the threshold and had youth and enthusiasm and purpose; the mother was broken and without a star. If the mother would come to me, how gladly would I open my arms once more! But would she? No. How could she, knowing what people would say, having to meet the cold eyes of the rector and his wife and seeing children

withdrawn from her presence? Wherever she made her home it could not be in my house.

But—the thought came later, in a flash—it could still be with me: if somewhere else! Somewhere where her story was not known. Why should I live all my days in one spot? It is true that I was devoted to it; but ought one to be so local, so parochial? It was a not too admirable line of least resistance. Here was the great world open to me and I had cowered all my days in one corner. Mrs. O'Gorman had twitted me about it; and she was a wise woman. How helpful she would be to-day! I had a few years left, I hoped—why should I not move to London or—or anywhere? Then Rose and I could be happy together, once more, and the other Rose could have a room always ready for her. How gay we might all yet be!

But probably to join me again would not be the mother's wish. She might prefer to be alone; she might fear that her melancholy would weigh upon me.

All day long as I moved about London, and even as I turned over the portfolios, I was picturing the drama in my house, a house that possibly

I was to leave for ever. Rose-the-less, white and tense, passionately, bitterly determined to be her mother's companion; her mother gently but firmly refusing to come into her life. And how would these scenes end? Would the girl lose all control, and accepting the repudiation rush angrily off? Might she not indeed be even now in London? Or would the mother acquiesce? Which was the weaker? I could not tell.

And what did they say of me? They might even fall out over me, each claiming a bigger share of their poor old foster-father. And, in the absence of Mrs. O'Gorman, no Solomon to consult! Perhaps I ought not to have come away after all?

The journey back was an agony, even with some purchases to gloat over, and my nervousness increased as I approached the house. What should I find? Would both be there? Would either?

I should have been more trustful of the kindly gods. For Rose and Rose were waiting for me

at the door, smiling at me and at each other. Whatever solution they had reached satisfied both. I could see that in a flash, and seeing that, I was happy.

"Rose and I," said Rose-the-first, later that evening when we were all cosy, "have had a great talk, haven't we?"

"Tremendous," said Rose, laying her hand on her mother's and stroking it.

"And we've decided that nothing must interfere with Rose's plans to become an artist."

"You decided, you mean," said Rose-the-second.

"We've decided," her mother repeated, "and so Rose is going off almost directly to her Hostel, just as if no ghost had frightened her."

"O mother!" said Rose reproachfully.

"And I'm going too," Rose-the-first continued.

"Both going?" I exclaimed in alarm.

"Only to find a house," she went on.

"A house?"

"Yes, I've only one desire in the world, and that is to have a house, and the reason I want a house is to be able to invite a guest."

She paused a moment.

"Dearest Dombeen," she said, "I want one guest only. You. My greatest wish is to find a house in some place that pleased you, where you would come, whenever you cared, to stay with me for a little, or," she added with one of her radiant smiles, "if you liked, altogether."

She placed her other hand on mine.

"Because, you know," she went on, "I am quite a rich woman now. And we have been your guests so long, Rose and I. I was your guest for fourteen years; won't you be mine in return? Rose has been your guest for fourteen years; won't you let her mother put you up now and then just to show a little gratitude? Won't you?"

"Yes, Dombeen, won't you?" said Rose-the-second. "You oughtn't to refuse us now. Because although you're the youngest man in the world you're not a boy any more, you know. You're seventy, and you must be looked after.

You had a horrid, frightening cold last winter."

"But——" I began. I had no objections to urge, but I wanted to be pressed.

"No 'buts,'" said Rose. "There's only one thing that you can be permitted to say to stop the whole plan. Nothing else will serve."

And what is that?" I asked.

That you're tired of Roses."

"Never!" I said.

And that is how it happens that I have left my old home for ever and am finishing this story in a house overlooking the sea.

But I hear Rose calling.

"Dombeen," she says, "there's a telegram from Rose saying she's coming by the 5.5, and she can stay a week."

"Splendid!" I reply.

THE END

